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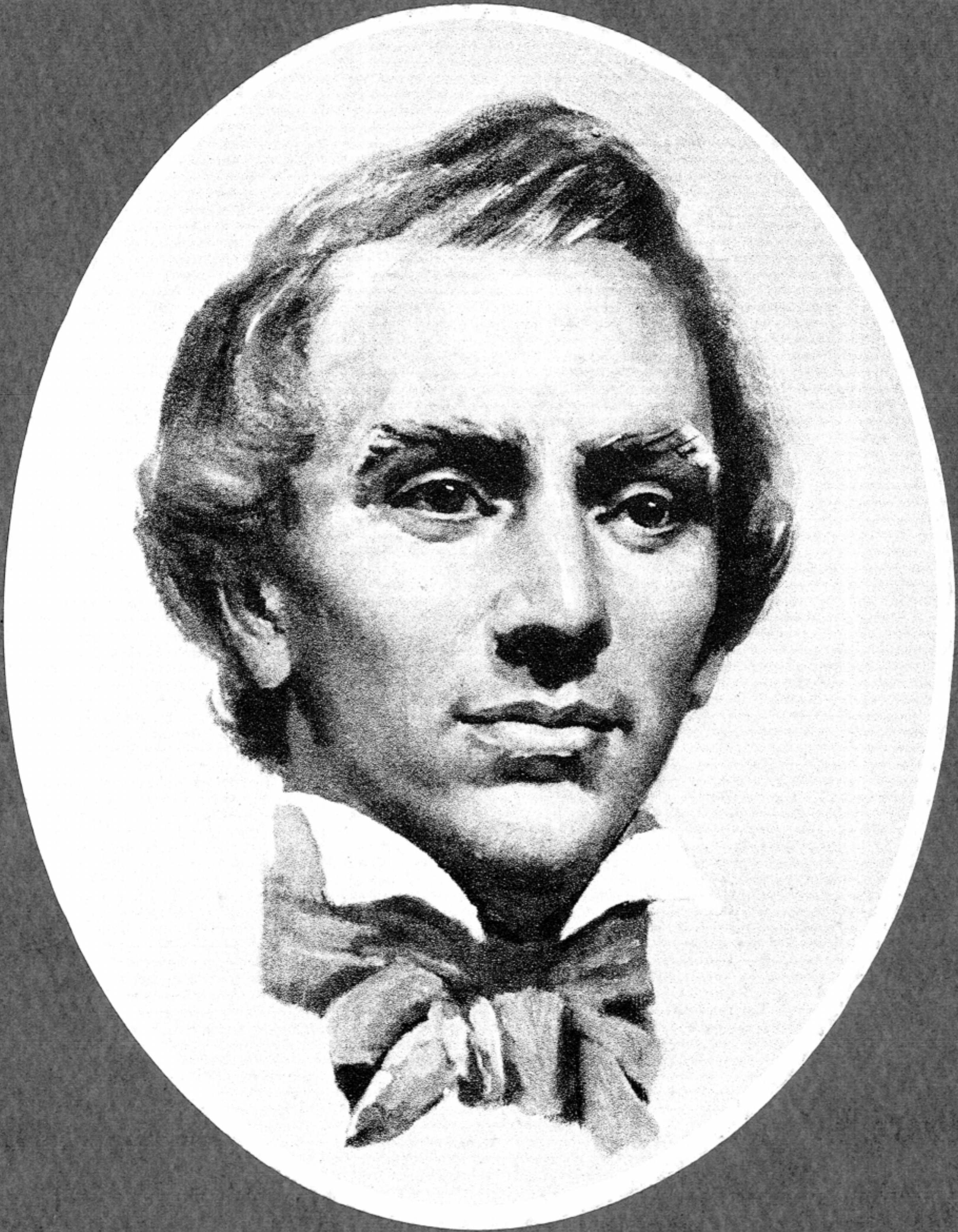
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BYU Studies

A VOICE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LDS SCHOLARS



SPRING 1969

Cover: A modern artistic conception of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

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VOLUME IX

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Guest Editor's Prologue

Truman G. Madsen*

Imagine yourself sifting through some documents on western New York and finding this typescript interview with a Presbyterian lady who grew up on a farm close to Joseph Smith's:

[she] . . . said her father loved young Joseph Smith and often hired him to work with his boys. She was about six years old, she said, when he first came to their home . . .

She remembered, she said, the excitement stirred up among some of the people over the boy's first vision, and of hearing her father contend that it was only the sweet dream of a pure-minded boy.

She stated that one of their church leaders came to her father to remonstrate against his allowing such close friendship between his family and the "Smith boy," as he called him. Her father, she said, defended his own position by saying that the boy was the best help he had ever found . . . when Joseph Smith worked with them the work went steadily forward and he got the full worth of the wages he paid.

Not until Joseph had had a second vision, she averred, and began to write a book . . . did her parents cut off their friendship for all the Smiths, for *all* the family followed Joseph. Even the father, intelligent man that he was, could not discern the evil he was helping to promote . . .

This is one of the "finds" of the researchers enlisted during recent years to pursue Mormon origins in New York. It is the only document yet discovered in which someone outside the Church has recorded hearing of Joseph Smith's First Vision at the time he had it.

The document has raised many questions and brought to the surface many differing philosophies of history when shown to professionals. In general they agree that we do not know enough about it to rely on its complete authenticity. We can

*Dr. Madsen, professor of philosophy at Brigham Young University, is director of the Institute of Mormon Studies. He has lectured and published widely in the history and philosophy of religion.

summarize our knowledge of it by saying this is a late recollection of a Mrs. Palmer and that it is apparently not in her words but someone else's (unknown) who recorded it. Adepts in Mormon history will know how the portrait that emerges, squares, or fails to, with many dime-a-dozen legendary statements that we find still circulating in Palmyra.

The point here is not what the document says but what the find illustrates: the need for gathering, the absolute error of supposing that "It's all been done." Anybody on any day can walk into almost any library and find source materials that have important, even crucial, bearing on Mormon origins. Moreover, treasures lie under our very noses. This one came out of Sevier County, Utah. Our own attics may contain notes and scraps, or even diaries, that are, we suppose, of interest only, if at all, to the family genealogist. But the hypothesis is now an axiom: there are vital tasks of gathering, researching, and interpreting which are too vast for any one mind, or any one hundred minds. They must involve us all.

The Institute of Mormon Studies, finding and funding such researchers, is a kind of cooperative network. Appropriately, we are involved in this cooperative historical project, which begins, logically and chronologically, with New York. (See Allen and Arrington below.)

The period awaits full exploration by social scientists, artists, literary historians, and as Dr. Lyon says herein, restoration archaeologists. Our task is conceived as preliminary—to deepen the fund of reliable data.

Four factors encourage us:

First, the recognition that nothing has been done that cannot be improved and supplemented. B. H. Roberts, who frankly (and many would say quite justly) announced that his *Comprehensive History* was "the masterpiece of historical writing in the first century of the Church's history," also said, "It will all be done over again, better." The "better," we interpolate, whatever else it may be, will show in the precision and scope of the materials, in the insight and wholeness of interpretation, in the interlacings of happenings with the development of ideas. Compared to what has been done, and what is not yet attempted, there are "alps on alps." (Rodman Paul believes we need to "catch up" with such social scientists as O'Dea,

et al.) Cooperative research will be broader and deeper than the work of isolated individuals.

Second, a deepening pool of historical talent. More persons of established competence in history are active today in history of religions, intellectual history, and American history, both in and beyond the Church, than at any prior time. And leg-work researchers are legion. The papers herein, for example, have been drawn together by a half dozen individuals. But the research on which these papers are based has involved over a hundred people across the country.

Third, the removal of barriers and isolations. We have not witnessed anything quite like it before. Mormon and non-Mormon, veteran and neophyte, library and seminary, university and chance acquaintance, historical society and family friend have "joined hands" all in a calmer, kinder mood. The pattern of vitriolic blast and hasty fence repairs can still be seen here and there. But among responsible minds there is a recognition, a motivating one, that the varieties of scholarship often make friends of supposed enemies. All of us can unite as annalists before we separate as analysts; we can work long and hard together on the search for sources before we begin to choose up sides. Such a federation of methods and personalities is a present reality.

Fourth, the expanding interest in the Western world (reflected in our state universities) in the coherent study of religions. By 1980 the Church itself will have a membership of five to six million, international in character. The fresh perspectives of those who become identified with the movement, and their allies, will surely intensify concern for the Church's legacy, its authentic past. The very statistical importance of the Church will draw the attention of competent observers; and those satisfied with surface glimpses will inevitably diminish. Backgrounds, in short, will more and more come to the foreground.

In that spirit, then, we announce with unqualified approval the meticulous work being done under Earl Olson's staff at the LDS Historian's Office. Archivist Dean Jessee's paper herein is a subtopic of that project. It is the historiography of the official history; an analysis of the composition of the seven-volume *History of the Church* (DHC), the times of its ac-

cumulation and dictation in manuscript form, the secretaries involved, the decisions as to what to include and omit, patterns and sources used in correcting processes. Unknown to some, this patient reconstruction has been underway for some time at the instance of the Church authorities. It is now beginning to be made available to interested scholars.

Our search has shaken several idols of some historical critics about the New York era. For example:

(1) the dogma that the unedited manuscript history is most reliable. In case after case we find corrections in the published version based on hard evidence. The negative connotation of "edit" cannot be generalized.

(2) the "burned-over district" stereotype derived, perhaps unfairly, from Whitney Cross. All was not feverish and frenzied. Instead, in 1819 religious evangelism had phases which were "solemn, still, and reflective," commending withdrawal into silence.

(3) several word-shifts. We have found ourselves misreading Joseph. He speaks, for example, of "parties" (meaning more than denominations or churches), of "religious excitement" (meaning dispute as well as conversion), of "revival" (meaning spiritual awakenings as well as meetings), of "Lord," "angel," "persecution" with meanings slightly, but importantly, different from present usage.

(4) either-or. Our inquiry has at times been crippled by questions whose form guaranteed distortion. Was Joseph stimulated by his Bible or by some preachers? Did Joseph Smith want a knowledge of which church to join or forgiveness of his sins? Did he behold the Father and the Son or angels? The answer is often "both/and" instead of "either/or."

A caution or corrective emerges from these as a working principle. Let us not claim more or less for Joseph Smith than he claimed for himself. That is primary. It forces us back to original materials. We must be concerned at the outset with what is what, avoiding what Feigl called the twin temptations: reductive tendencies ("nothing but") and seductive tendencies ("something more than").

Out of these studies, which we intend to continue and expand, will come published monographs or source-bibliogra-

phies for each period of the Church. Out of these, in turn, may come a carefully annotated *DHC*, footnoted on each name, place, and date and explaining alteration, a chronicle in which future scholars may place confidence. And out of these, in turn, will emerge a comprehensive history which will be for its time a new masterpiece.

This means an official invitation to all: Match the desire to publish, to "break into print" with a concern to contribute your "raw data" to the development of a monumental monograph on sources. (Even a three-by-five card with the name of a New York convert will be credited to you.)

The committee has encouraged me to add a word on the limits of perspective, historical perspective in particular. No mistake is more inept among critics of Mormonism than the supposition, often derived from their own traditional outlook, that past events, beginning events, are "what we go on" religiously, and that the present completely hinges on the past. It was exactly that assumption which Joseph Smith uprooted. That there were unique and unrepeatable aspects in his experience is obvious. But he insisted that in authentic religion there are public, shareable, and in a less precise sense, repeatable experiences. In a Church totally committed to the "yet to come" of divine revelation and one equally committed to rescue the past from obscurity, the point is not to swallow and accept, but to duplicate and reenact. Religiously we are condemned if we cling vicariously to the highest experiences of the past in the absence of our own. And it is no paradox that our interest in present experience intensifies interest in the past.

A similar distortion arises in historical approaches to Joseph himself. A tremendous loss occurs when one must turn from the occurrence, the personal observation, to the written word, to the preserved, to the presently available, to the presently understood. Some have written as if Joseph Smith's First Vision were his final or at least foremost. Yet in the very year he was dictating the earliest known account of the First Vision to Frederick G. Williams (1831-32), he received "The Vision" (February 16, 1832) with Sidney Rigdon. Some of its differences from the First Vision are that it was (1) shared, witnessed, and written jointly with Sidney Rigdon; (2) recorded in the spirit of the event on the very day and place of its occurrence; and (3) immediately copied

and circulated far beyond Ohio. And the Prophet later said that he could reveal "a hundred fold more" of what he learned in this vision, which included their both seeing the Father and the Son, but for two reasons: he was not permitted, and the saints were not prepared.

Now that we have copies of the three early manuscript accounts of the First Vision bound in this single volume, we are impressed with their harmony considering the very different circumstances of their writing: (1) the 1831-32 manuscript is apparently an attempt to get it on record; (2) the 1835 account relates a spontaneous interview between the Prophet and a Jewish minister, recorded by his scribe "as nearly as follows;" and (3) the 1838 record was written to answer "the many reports" circulating as far west as Missouri which the Prophet said were designed to militate against the character of the Church. Several members of the Institute of Mormon Studies are presently preparing studies of these accounts, recorded interviews, and journal reports of gatherings where the Prophet presented or mentioned his experiences in New York. These will be published in future issues of *BYU Studies* as they are completed.

Thus, if the focus of this issue is "What is the evidence for these events?" that is only the foreword to the implicit focus and question: "What are these events evidence for?"

All the contributors have written in a tentative tone and commend the same tone in the reader. They invite further scholarly analysis, fully expecting that these formulations may very well be burst by the growing content of research. For in the study of history as in history itself, the final word is that there is no final word.

Mormon Origins in New York: An Introductory Analysis

James B. Allen and Leonard J. Arrington*

In the fall of 1967 a small group of Mormon historians met in Salt Lake City to discuss the problems involved in writing the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹ They were concerned with the history of the Church and its background in New York from 1820 to 1830, the decade which may be called the period of Mormon origins. Well aware that most books and articles on Mormonism say something about the period, they were also aware that no searching, in-depth analysis had yet been made of the entire decade. It was apparent that all periods of Mormon history were crying for more study and fresh historical analysis, but New York seemed the logical place to begin.

The five men formed themselves into an organization called "Mormon Origins in New York," with Truman G. Madsen, director of the Institute of Mormon Studies at Brigham Young University, as chairman or director. The purpose of the organization was to promote studies of all phases of Mormon history in New York. Mormon scholarship seemed to have reached a point that it should be concerned not only with "proving" the claims of Joseph Smith, but also with recognizing the human side of Church history. With respect to possible new evaluations of Joseph Smith, for example, Dr. Madsen later wrote, "Now that the anti-Mormon will to exaggerate, and the pro-Mormon will to gloss are antiquated, we

*Dr. Allen, associate professor of history at Brigham Young University, is the author of many articles on Mormon history. Leonard Arrington, professor of economics at Utah State University, currently serves as president of the Western History Association and has written widely on Church and Western history. The writers are grateful to Truman Madsen, Davis Bitton, and T. Edgar Lyon for suggestions on this article.

¹The group consisted of Truman G. Madsen, Leonard J. Arrington, T. Edgar Lyon, Richard L. Bushman, and James B. Allen.

can perhaps see Joseph Smith as he saw himself: both as a Prophet and as a growing, not infallible, human being."² The human failings of many early Mormons, leaders and followers alike, have frequently been irresponsibly exploited by anti-Mormon writers. Evidence of these failings needs to be more responsibly analyzed and clarified, as does evidence of their more commendable qualities, in an effort to achieve the proper historical balance of all aspects of Church history in this early period.

The "Steering Committee" began immediately to encourage research in the political and social setting of the Church in New York, the theological and organizational aspects of the New York period, and the background of individuals, both Mormons and non-Mormons, who were involved with the nascent Church. There were two aims: (1) to gather a body of primary material; and (2) to stimulate the publication of monographs based on these materials. Every effort would be made to avoid slanting the material; it should tell its own story.

Dr. Madsen arranged through the Institute of Mormon Studies to send several scholars to the eastern United States during the summer of 1968. Although the time was limited, these men scoured libraries, studied newspapers, and sought to find private individuals who might uncover hitherto unknown source materials. In this issue of *BYU Studies* two of these men, Milton Backman and Larry Porter, present some of their findings.

THE PROBLEM OF MORMON ORIGINS

The problem of Mormon origins may be approached in several different ways, although these approaches are not always mutually exclusive. One is what might be called the polemical approach, which emphasizes Joseph Smith and his spiritual experiences. This approach implicitly raises the ques-

²Madsen to James B. Allen, November 25, 1968. The Prophet, indeed, often alluded to his own weaknesses, as he did on February 8, 1843: "This morning I read German and visited with a brother and sister from Michigan, who thought that 'a prophet is always a prophet,' but I told them that a prophet was a prophet only when acting as such." Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1958), Vol. 5, p. 265. (Hereafter cited as DHC.) See also *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 302; Vol. 6, p. 366.

tion, "Did these things actually happen?" Devout Latter-day Saint writers naturally assume that they did, and their publications are frequently devoted to marshaling the evidence to prove them or to detailing the experiences in such a way that spiritual understanding will be enhanced. This is called *apologia*—not in derision, but simply to classify it as the kind of writing that is intended primarily to defend and justify. This approach has value not only in promoting faith in the Restoration but also in expression, even for nonbelievers, of the essential spirit of the faith. Unless a historian has an appreciation of this spirit, he will find it difficult to understand the history of Mormonism, or, indeed, of any religious movement.

In a sense, the so-called "debunkers" might fit into this same category. Their emphasis, too, is on Joseph Smith and his spiritual experiences. Convinced that such experiences did not happen and that Joseph was a fraud, their basic intent has been to discredit him and disprove his claims. Many of these writers, particularly those who wrote in the nineteenth century, could see nothing good in the Church or in Joseph Smith.

A second way to approach the problem of Mormon origins is to study the political, economic, and social environment of the areas and time in which Joseph Smith lived. Here one is concerned, not with proving or disproving any spiritual claims, but with historical analysis designed to promote a better understanding of every aspect of Church history. Since this approach is analytical and the writer strives to avoid any effort to build or destroy faith, his work is usually naturalistic.

A third approach, which we might call pluralistic, is often taken by Mormon scholars who are also very much devoted to the faith. They accept the basic claims of Joseph Smith. At the same time, they see great value in looking also at the naturalistic aspects of his history. They demonstrate that Mormons are capable of looking at their history with both faith and "objectivity." While their writings are not necessarily or specifically pointed toward "proving" the faith, implicit in them is an acceptance of the faith and a belief that they can be of service to the Church through an attempt at balanced reporting. It is in this spirit that the following articles were written.

The deluge of literature which has been written on the origin of Mormonism is almost overwhelming but, like the literature of other historical events, most of it can be traced to a few basic sources or classified according to a few general traditions. The following list, although by no means complete, represents the better-known publications upon which current knowledge of the period of Mormon origins is based.

The early claims of Restoration. "Mormonism," or "the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ," had its official beginning in the 1820's with the assertions of Joseph Smith, the teenage son of a Palmyra, New York, farmer of the same name, that he (the son) had received visions and communications from heavenly beings. Nothing in his own hand has survived from this period, but there are references to his claims in letters, diaries, and newspapers from the late 1820's and on.³ In brief, these sources indicate that several in the family of Joseph Smith, Sr., influenced by revivals conducted by itinerant preachers, joined the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Young Joseph was also "smitten with a sense of sin" as the revivalists would have said, but was perplexed as to which church he should join. After earnest prayer he came to understand that he would be the instrument through which the true Gospel of Christ would be restored. Heavenly beings directed him to a nearby hill where he found gold plates which he "translated . . . by the gift and power of God." The translation was published in Palmyra in 1830 as the Book of Mormon. Declared to be a record of the people of the Western Hemisphere, it contained both history and theology. Widely circulated and commented upon, the Book of Mormon was the first religious tract of the infant Church of Christ, founded in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, on April 6, 1830.

The Campbell-Hurlburt-Howe tradition. Although contemporary newspapers contained much comment, the first serious attempt to explicate Mormon origins was made in a

³A review of this literature is published and discussed in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness For Christ in America: The Book of Mormon* (Independence, Mo., 1942; republished by Brigham Young University, 1960 *et seq.*); and a second volume published under the same title in Independence, Missouri, in 1951, and in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1959. A letter to Lucius Fenn from Seneca County, N. Y., dated February 12, 1830, is published in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York, 1958), pp. 26-29.

critical analysis of the Book of Mormon published by Alexander Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ, in the *Millennial Harbinger*, February 7, 1831, under the title "Delusions." Campbell sought to show that Joseph Smith was the real author of the Book of Mormon. Declaring the Prophet to be "as ignorant and impudent a knave as ever wrote a book," Campbell asserted that young Smith "betrays the cloven foot" in his many errors.

Campbell's case against Joseph Smith can be reduced to three basic arguments: (1) the Book of Mormon was inconsistent with the Old and New Testaments; (2) it reflected the religious cross-currents of western New York in the late 1820's;⁴ (3) its writing style was that of an ignorant person.

BOOKS ATTACK JOSEPH SMITH'S CLAIMS

Campbell's blast at the Book of Mormon was the forerunner of a long series of publications designed to prove Joseph Smith an imposter. The first major book, *Mormonism Unveiled* [*sic.*], was published by E. D. Howe in Painesville, Ohio, in 1834. The publisher of the *Painesville Telegraph*, Howe had begun, as early as 1831, the printing of anti-Mormon letters and articles.⁵ He had made the acquaintance of Philastus Hurlburt,⁶ who was excommunicated from the Church on June 23, 1833, for immorality and who spent the last part of the year 1833 collecting affidavits about Joseph Smith and his family from people who had known them in New York and Pennsylvania. These affidavits, which denigrated the character of the Smith family, provided about half the bulk of *Mormonism Unveiled*. Although Howe took credit

⁴"This prophet Smith, through his stone spectacles, wrote on the plates of Nephi, in his book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. He decides all the great controversies;—infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the questions of free masonry [*sic.*], republican government, and the rights of man." Alexander Campbell, "Delusions," *Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 2 (February 7, 1831), p. 93.

⁵See Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, Vol. 2, Chaps. 7 and 8.

⁶Variously spelled—Hurlbut, Hulbert, Hulburt, etc.

for the book, Hurlburt seems to have been the principal compiler.⁷

Mormonism Unveiled began with a brief description of the Smith family: they were "lazy, indolent, ignorant, and superstitious." Then came a seventy-five page summary and analysis of the Book of Mormon. After discussion of the activities of the Mormons to 1834, the compilers presented letters and affidavits from various people who had lived in the Palmyra region and had knowledge of the Smiths. These included a series of nine letters written in 1831 by Ezra Booth, a Methodist minister who had joined the Mormon Church then apostatized after a disappointing journey with Joseph Smith to Missouri. His letters declared that he left the Church because he had seen Joseph Smith's prophecies fail.⁸ The tone of the other statements collected by Hurlburt is illustrated by that of Peter Ingersoll, sworn before a Wayne County judge. Ingersoll claimed to have known Joseph Smith personally from 1822 to 1830, and stated that the family had been money diggers, even trying to get Ingersoll to join them, and that Joseph had pretended to locate the money through the use of a certain stone. Ingersoll also stated that Joseph had admitted to him that he never could actually see into the stone, and later that the finding of the "Golden Bible" was really a deception. Other letters told of Smith's money digging, clairvoyance, and generally deceptive qualities, while one statement signed by fifty-one people declared that the Smiths were "destitute of moral character" and addicted to vicious habits. The chief problem with all these affidavits, of course, is the fact that we know little or nothing about the people who wrote them (or even whether they wrote them), and the extent to which they were influenced by jealousy, envy, and

⁷In 1878 Howe wrote: "In 1834 I wrote & compiled a book of 290 pages, which was entitled 'Mormonism Unveiled,' which contained a succinct & true history of the rise & progress of the sect up to that time, as I verily believed." Eber D. Howe, *Autobiography and Recollections of a Pioneer Printer . . .* (Painesville, Ohio, 1878), p. 45. All Mormon sources credit Hurlburt with collecting the affidavits and writing most of the manuscript, which was then sold to Howe for 500 copies of the book after printed. See *Chardon Spectator and Geauga Gazette* (Chardon, Ohio) April 12, 1834; sermon of George A. Smith on November 15, 1864, *Journal of Discourses* (26 vols., Liverpool), Vol. 11, pp. 8-9; *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* (Liverpool), Vol. 44 (October 23, 1882), pp. 334-5.

⁸See the discussion of Booth's letters in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church: Century I* (6 vols., Salt Lake City, 1930), Vol. 1, pp. 265-267.

spite. Such statements were a dime a dozen in contemporary America, and most historians give them short shrift.⁹ There was also a letter from Charles Anthon to whom Martin Harris had taken certain characters purported to have been copied from the gold plates. Anthon now expressed his feeling that Harris had been deluded and the whole Book of Mormon story was a hoax.

The final chapter of *Mormonism Unveiled* advanced the Spaulding-Rigdon theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon. Sidney Rigdon, said the compilers, was the real author of the Mormon "conspiracy"; Joseph Smith was too illiterate to have written the book by himself. It was said that Rigdon had come into possession of the manuscript of an imaginative romance concerning early America, written about 1812 by the Reverend Solomon Spaulding, who had deposited the manuscript with Patterson and Lambdin, printers in Pittsburgh, where Rigdon obtained it while he lived there in 1823 or 1824. Hearing of Joseph Smith and his money-digging, Rigdon concocted a scheme whereby Joseph would claim to have dug up and translated the gold plates. Rigdon, according to this theory, had taken Spaulding's manuscript and modified it to suit his purposes. Evidence for the theory was seen in (1) the testimony of several people who claimed to have seen the Spaulding manuscript or heard parts of it read and who noted many exact parallels with the Book of Mormon, including proper names and specific events; (2) the ready acceptance by Sidney Rigdon of Mormonism in December, 1830, and the rapid move of Joseph Smith to Ohio in January, 1831, after the first public meeting of the two schemers.¹⁰

⁹Non-Mormon historian Whitney Cross, for example, comments on the Hurlburt documents as follows: "Every circumstance seems to invalidate the obviously prejudiced testimonials of unsympathetic neighbors (collected by one hostile individual whose style of composition stereotypes the language of numerous witnesses) that the Smiths were either squatters or shiftless 'frontier drifters.' Many an honest and industrious farmer followed their identical experience, pursued by bad luck or poor judgment, and sought a new fling at fortune farther west. No doubt the Smiths, like many of their fellows, wasted valuable time hunting gold at the proper turn of the moon. One of the potent sources of Joseph's local ill repute may well have been the jealousy of other persons who failed to discover golden plates in the glacial sands of the drumlins." Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, (Ithaca, 1950), pp. 141-142.

¹⁰The Spaulding theory has long since been discredited. For one recent analysis see Marvin S. Hill, "The Role of Christian Primitivism in the Origin and Development of the Mormon Kingdom, 1830-1844" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Chicago, 1968), pp. 92-97.

The Hurlburt-Howe collaboration provided basic materials upon which nearly all subsequent anti-Mormon writings were based. Even "friendly" historians often drew information about Mormon origins from works which relied heavily on *Mormonism Unveiled*.¹¹ Along with Campbell's "Delusions," *Mormonism Unveiled* marked the beginning of a traditional approach to Mormon origins, focussing on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon and attempting to demonstrate that the Mormon prophet was a crude but deliberate fraud. Campbell felt that Joseph Smith had composed the book himself, while Hurlburt and Howe involved Sidney Rigdon in a conspiracy with Joseph. Later writers frequently criticized the Book of Mormon in the Campbell tradition (Hurlburt and Howe made light of the book in somewhat the same fashion), but explained the origin of Mormonism in a manner suggested by the Hurlburt documents.

The year 1842 was significant in Mormon historiography. Not only did Joseph Smith then begin serial publication of his own important history, but four important anti-Mormon works also appeared: Rev. John A. Clark's *Gleanings by the Way*, Jonathan B. Turner's *Mormonism in All Ages*, Daniel P. Kidder's *Mormonism and the Mormons*, and Henry Caswall's *The City of the Mormons*. Clark, an Episcopal pastor in Palmyra, recalled his impressions of Joseph Smith, beginning in 1827. He knew of Smith's money digging and his claim concerning the discovery of gold plates, but considered it all a hoax and Joseph himself as dull and "utterly destitute of genius." Drawing heavily from *Mormonism Unveiled*, he told almost the same story of the origin of Mormonism. His only new contribution was another letter by Professor Anthon, written in 1840 and originally published in the Episcopal *Church Record*.¹²

Jonathan Turner, often regarded as the founder of the land-grant system of colleges, also drew heavily from Hurl-

¹¹G. B. Arbaugh, *Revelation in Mormonism* (Chicago, 1932), accepts and argues for the Spaulding theory. Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment* (Minneapolis, 1944) presents an interpretation of Mormonism that is based primarily on the kind of "information" found in *Mormonism Unveiled*. Fawn Brodie in *No Man Knows My History* (New York, 1945) accepts many statements in the affidavits but refutes the Spaulding theory. The authors of several general histories of America, in turn, frequently follow Mrs. Brodie's interpretation of Joseph Smith.

¹²Both of Anthon's letters are republished, with appropriate criticism, in Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 102-109.

burt's affidavits, presenting the then standard image of young Joseph as a clairvoyant charlatan. Recognizing that the evidence linking Rigdon, Smith, and the Spaulding manuscript was inconclusive, he decided that Joseph Smith alone was the author. However, he presumed that Joseph had access to the Spaulding manuscript through some source other than Sidney Rigdon. Rigdon, according to Turner, became the chief power in the Church after he persuaded Joseph Smith to move to Ohio, and it was Rigdon who formulated the doctrine of the restoration, gathering, and other traditional Mormon concepts. Kidder, whose work appeared later in the year, gently chided Turner for this modification of the Spaulding theory.

BOOK OF MORMON WRITER BRILLIANT OR IGNORANT

In these writings one can see the development of an interesting inconsistency. Some writers held that the Book of Mormon had to be the production of Joseph Smith, for only an ignorant person could have produced such a work. Others, arguing that it was the kind of work which only a brilliant, imaginative person could have produced, assigned it to Sidney Rigdon. Still others said that Joseph Smith was clever enough to have produced the book by himself.

Also published in 1842 was *The City of the Mormons* by Henry Caswall, one of the earliest works about the Mormons printed in Europe. A professor of divinity at Kemper College (Episcopal) in Missouri, Caswall showed familiarity with those writings of Joseph Smith which had recently been published in the Church-owned *Times and Seasons*, but drew most of his information from Clark and Turner. Caswall accepted the Spaulding-Rigdon theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon, but, reflecting his reading of Turner, pointed out that some people felt Rigdon was too intelligent to write such a work. In his work published in 1843, *The Prophet of the Nineteenth Century*, Caswall anticipated, as Turner had done, the social analysis of Mormon origins adopted by many modern scholars. Wrote the snobbish Caswall:

Mormonism is a system which could not have been easily produced or readily developed in England. The mature religious institutions of the mother country would have appeared a bulwark against its progress as a fanaticism; . . . Had it been preached in the first place in Britain, it would

probably have crept in the dust like other reptile forms of delusion. . . . But in the Western Hemisphere its antecedent probability of success was incalculably greater. . . . The fuel was already collected, the pile was duly prepared, and an accidental spark alone was wanting to kindle a blaze of fanaticism, which no existing means would avail to extinguish (pp. 1-2).

By the 1850's non-Mormons had added little to the general theme begun by Campbell and Hurlburt-Howe. By this time they were using some of the material published by the Mormons themselves, but they always returned to the tradition of *Mormonism Unveiled* to prove the "true" character of Joseph Smith and the "true" origin of the Book of Mormon. Robert Chambers' *History of the Mormons*, published in 1853, is a good example.

One of the most influential anti-Mormon works of the later nineteenth century was Pomeroy Tucker's *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (1867). Tucker had lived in Palmyra since 1823, was employed in the printing shop that published the first edition of the Book of Mormon, and was personally acquainted with Joseph Smith and his associates. Drawing heavily from *Mormonism Unveiled* as well as his own recollections, Tucker's conclusions were essentially those of Hurlburt-Howe, although he did modify a few important details. He did not remember, for example, the youthful Joseph as ignorant or unschooled:

Joseph, moreover, as he grew in years, had learned to read comprehensively, in which qualification he was far in advance of his elder brother, and even of his father; and this talent was assiduously devoted, as he quitted or modified his idle habits, to the perusal of works of fiction and records of criminality, such for instance as would be classified with the "dime novels" of the present day. The stories of Stephen Burroughs and Captain Kidd, and the like, presented the highest charms for his expanding mental perceptions. As he further advanced in reading and knowledge, he assumed a spiritual or religious turn of mind, and frequently perused the Bible, becoming quite familiar with portions thereof, both of the Old and New Testaments; selected texts from which he quoted and discussed with great assurance when in the presence of his superstitious acquaintances (p. 17).

This approach anticipated a more recent line of scholarship which accepts Hurlburt's claims about Joseph Smith's money-

digging, clairvoyance, and dishonesty, but postulates that he was sufficiently well-read and clever to have written the Book of Mormon.

In 1885 Ellen E. Dickinson, a relative of Solomon Spaulding, published *New Light on Mormonism* (New York). Advertised as "a brief and succinct history of this Stupendous Delusion," Dickinson's work was largely a story of the Spaulding romance. It also gave much background, some of it contradictory, on *Mormonism Unveiled*, but was marred throughout by the author's complete acceptance of the Spaulding theory. One of her contributions was an 1882 interview with Philastus Hurlburt. Though Hurlburt would not admit it, she claimed that he had stolen the original manuscript from the Spaulding family in 1834 and turned it over to the Mormons, who destroyed it.

In *The Prophet of Palmyra* (New York, 1890), Thomas Gregg went back to the original "unlettered" theory by stating categorically that when Joseph Smith began his career "his untutored and feeble intellect had not yet grasped at anything beyond toying with mysterious things." After he obtained the Spaulding manuscript, according to Gregg, he got the idea of a new sect and was aided by confederates as bad as himself. Gregg ridiculed Joseph Smith's account of the origin of the Church. He published an interview with David Whitmer, for example, in which this Book of Mormon witness declared that, in translating, Joseph did not even use the gold plates but, rather, placed two chocolate-covered stones to his eyes, covered his face with a hat and saw the words appear (Chap. III).¹³

Gregg added two interesting items to this traditional approach to Mormon origins. One was a letter from Stephen S. Harding, who had been governor of Utah in 1862-1863. The letter, written in 1882, told of Harding's return to his boyhood home of Palmyra in 1829, just in time to be present when the first pages of the Book of Mormon came from the press. He told of the credulity of Joseph Smith's associates, of his own successful efforts to hoodwink them into believing that he, too,

¹³The two best historiographical discussions of Joseph Smith's method of "translating" the Gold Plates are: B. H. Roberts, "Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era*, Vol. 9 (April, May, July, 1906); and James E. Lancaster, "'By the Gift and Power of God': The Method of Translation of the Book of Mormon," *The Saints' Herald*, November 15, 1962, pp. 14-18, 22, 33.

had been chosen to assist in the work, and of his belief that the book originated with the Spaulding manuscript. Harding also claimed to have seen a newspaper notice in the Brookville *Enquirer*, as early as the fall of 1827, which mentioned Joseph Smith and the finding of a "Golden Bible." Mormon writers have sometimes used this as evidence that Joseph was telling the story that early, although the newspaper account itself has yet to be brought to light.

A second addition introduced by Gregg dealt with the appearance of a certain "mysterious stranger" whom earlier writers claimed visited Joseph Smith prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon. A gentleman of "undoubted character for veracity," said Gregg, stated that Sidney Rigdon was in Palmyra three different times, twice in 1827 and once in 1828. The same source also declared that Oliver Cowdery had arrived in Palmyra from Kirtland, Ohio, in 1826, then returned the following year to take up his well-known association with Joseph Smith. This, of course, linked Smith, Cowdery, and Rigdon all in the conspiracy. Although Gregg failed to divulge his source and no corroborating evidence has ever been discovered, the conspiracy theory first advanced by Hurlburt-Howe was receiving plenty of literary amplification.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the most widely quoted book on Mormonism was probably William Alexander Linn's *The Story of the Mormons* (New York, 1902). Linn devoted more space than any previous writer to the period of Mormon origins, and his book appeared impressive by its documentation. He used the Mormon writings of Joseph Smith, Lucy Smith, Orson Pratt, and Parley P. Pratt. Nevertheless, his primary source material was the Berrian Collection of Mormon materials (mostly anti-Mormon) in the New York Public Library. He relied heavily on John A. Clark, Pomeroy Tucker, a few magazine articles, and inevitably, Hurlburt-Howe. He devoted more space to the Smith family background than most earlier writers and added his own exegesis to the general story of Mormon origins. The original idea of golden plates, he suggested, was based on a thirteenth-century story of an "Everlasting Gospel" written on plates which was intended to supplant the New Testament. Because of his theological background, said Linn, Rigdon would have known the story (Chap. IX).

In 1931, Harry M. Beardsley published *Joseph Smith and his Mormon Empire*. Presenting again the theme that Joseph Smith was an "impoverished, illiterate, disreputable youth, the most notorious of a shiftless family" (p. 6), and that the Book of Mormon and the new religion were produced in collusion with Sidney Rigdon, Beardsley's superficial biography was a classic example of the old Campbell-Hurlburt-Howe tradition. A more scholarly work, published by George B. Arbaugh in 1932, was *Revelation in Mormonism: Its Character and Changing Forms*. Although staunchly in the Hurlburt-Howe tradition, Arbaugh was much more analytical than most of his predecessors, and was more successful in relating the origin of Mormonism to its social environment.

In brief, a full century after the original pattern was set, *Mormonism Unveiled*, with its emphasis on Joseph Smith's personality and his presumed collusion with Sidney Rigdon, still provided the pattern for explaining Mormon origins.¹⁴

CHURCH CLERKS APPOINTED

The Smith-Pratt tradition. During its early years the Church made little progress toward publishing a detailed, sympathetic account of its own origin. Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith apparently kept early notes and records, but on March 8, 1831, John Whitmer was appointed to "keep the church record and history continuously." Whitmer, however, did not deal with the period of Mormon origins. When he was released from his position in 1838, he refused to surrender his records and history; not until 1893 did his history become the property of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. John Corrill and Elias Higbee were appointed church historians in 1838, but Higbee did not write anything, and Corrill left the Church the same year. His history, published in 1839, contained nothing on the New York period.¹⁵

The first substantial Mormon effort to publish a history of the rise of the Church came with the printing of a series of

¹⁴Other significant non-Mormon writers of this period drew heavily from the same tradition, but their writings also took on some new dimensions which will be discussed below.

¹⁵Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, Vol. 1, p. 429; *John Whitmer's History* (Salt Lake City, 1966?); John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints . . .* (St. Louis, 1839).

letters by Oliver Cowdery in the Church paper, the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio), beginning in October, 1834,¹⁶ the same year that Hurlburt and Howe published their influential exposé. Cowdery received the assistance of Joseph Smith in the preparation of these letters, and the Mormon leader helped introduce the series by publishing a statement admitting that, in common with "most or all youths," he "fell into many vices and follies." "I have not [he said] been guilty of wronging or injuring any man or society of men"; but he admitted having such imperfections as "a light and too often, vain mind, exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation."¹⁷ This statement was apparently intended as a reply to some of the affidavits being collected and published by Hurlburt, for he wrote:

Having learned from the first No. of the Messenger and Advocate, that you were, not only about to "give a history of the rise and progress of the church of the Latter Day Saints; but, that said "history would necessarily embrace my life and character," I have been induced to give you the time and place of my birth; as I have learned that many of the opposers of those principles which I have held forth to the world, profess a personal acquaintance with me, though when [not] in my presence, represent me to be another person in age, education, and stature, from what I am.¹⁸

Cowdery's first letters contained lucid descriptions, often quoted by later Mormon writers, of his feelings as he met Joseph Smith, assisted in the translation of the Book of Mormon, and witnessed the angel (John the Baptist) who bestowed upon them the priesthood.

Cowdery's third and fourth letters were the first published works to associate the Methodist minister Rev. George Lane with Joseph Smith's religious experiences. In so doing Cowdery initiated a chronological confusion (discussed below) which has plagued Mormon historians ever since. Cowdery's letters told, in grandiose style, of the religious excitement which had aroused the Palmyra vicinity in 1823 (he does not say 1820), and which led to Joseph Smith's prayer and the appearance

¹⁶Actually, a brief "Rise and Progress of the Church of Christ" by W. W. Phelps was published as early as April, 1833 in *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Zion [Independence, Mo.]).

¹⁷*Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1 (December 1834), p. 40.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

of an angel who told him of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was eventually translated.

Cowdery's letters began a Mormon approach to the origin of the Church which, like the Hurlburt-Howe tradition, centered on Joseph Smith's background, personality, and spiritual experiences. Mormon writers in this tradition were inclined to leave out "strictly human" activities in an effort to counteract the debunkers who had gone to the opposite extreme.¹⁹ Emphasizing the positive, these Mormon writers concentrated on the visions and revelations which led to the publication of the Book of Mormon and the founding of the Church. It was unfortunate that *Mormonism Unveiled* and other anti-Mormon commentaries had appeared earlier, for this tended to make Mormon histories defensive.

HISTORY OF JOSEPH SMITH PUBLISHED

In 1838, Joseph Smith began to prepare his own history for publication. This history ran serially in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842-1846, and later in the *Millennial Star* and the *Deseret News*. It was in this history that Joseph Smith first prepared for publication the story of his First Vision, stating that it occurred in the year 1820.²⁰ The "History of Joseph Smith" elaborated on the young Prophet's activities during the years after 1820, and more particularly after 1827. The "History" contains a transcription of each revelation received during the period. As later published by B. H. Roberts, the section covering the period of Mormon origins occupies some 130 pages, and is an indispensable source for both Mormon and non-Mormon historians.

Prior to the original publication of the "History of Joseph Smith," however, two other Mormon sources recounted some of Joseph Smith's early experiences. One was a missionary tract written by Orson Pratt and printed in England in 1840 under the title, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Rec-*

¹⁹See *Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1 (December, 1834), p. 42; "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Ill.), Vol. 3 (March 15, 1842), pp. 726-727.

²⁰A discussion of the knowledge of the First Vision as it appeared in early Mormon and non-Mormon literature is given in James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 1 (Autumn, 1966), pp. 29-45.

ords. Pratt had apparently been authorized by Joseph Smith to publish this work, but he embellished the account of the First Vision in such a way that it took on a much more dramatic air than any story ever recorded by Joseph himself. His account has become the basis for some of the expanded versions of later Mormon writers.²¹ In 1842 Orson Hyde printed a missionary tract in Germany entitled *A Cry from the Wilderness: A Voice from the Dust of the Earth*, which contained a greatly elaborated account of the vision. The same year Joseph Smith published in the *Times and Seasons* the "Wentworth Letter," which contained an abbreviated account of the vision.²² His more detailed history began to appear in print shortly thereafter. The early experiences of Joseph Smith as told by himself in his "History" took on the aura of scripture when they appeared in the first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*, published by Franklin D. Richards in England in 1851 and accepted by the Church in 1880 as one of its "standard works."

Shortly after the death of Joseph Smith, his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, began a biography of her son. She was assisted by Mrs. Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, a devout member of the Church and a competent writer. In 1853, this history was published in England by Orson Pratt, under the title *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations*. When copies of the book arrived in Utah, however, *Biographical Sketches* was criticized by Brigham Young and Utah historians as containing many inaccuracies, and it was recalled and suppressed. The book was republished in 1880 by the Reorganized Church. Still later, in 1902, the *Improvement Era* published a revised edition under the title, *History of the Prophet Joseph, by his Mother*. There have been various revised editions since that time.²³

Lucy Smith's history has become a basic source for most writers who deal in any detail with the Mormon Prophet's family background. The first nine chapters deal with Lucy's

²¹See, for example, Ivan J. Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration* (Provo, Utah, 1967), p. 31.

²²"Church History," *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3 (March 1, 1842), pp. 706-707.

²³The original edition may be compared with the most recent edition in Jerald & Sandra Tanner, *Changes in Joseph Smith's History* (Salt Lake City, 1966?). See also Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, Vol. 1, p. 14n. There is some evidence to suggest that Lucy Smith was compiling her history prior to the death of Joseph.

immediate family, the Macks, and give life sketches of her father, brothers, and sisters, as well as the story of her own courtship and marriage. The Macks were presented as an honorable, industrious family, in obvious contrast to the rather critical image that had been presented by non-Mormon writers. Mrs. Smith also provided a seven-generation genealogy of the Smith family and a four-generation Mack family line. Other chapters give many details not found elsewhere concerning the Smith family experiences after Lucy's marriage to Joseph Smith, Sr. She emphasizes the spiritual nature of the family by relating seven visions experienced by her husband prior to those of their son. Later chapters quote extensively from her son's own history, which had already been published, although a few of her own observations and memories are included.

The writings of Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith, Lucy Smith, and Orson Pratt provided the basic Mormon sources for the period of Mormon origins. Centering on Joseph Smith's background, personality, and spiritual experiences, they tended to be defensive and were designed primarily to build faith in Joseph Smith as a prophet and religious leader. They established the pattern followed by most Mormon histories down to the present.

Illustrative of this approach is *Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet*, published by George Q. Cannon in 1888. Writing primarily for young believers, Cannon (who was assisted by his son, Frank J. Cannon) followed the general outlines of the Joseph Smith and Lucy Mack Smith histories, embellishing the narrative with his own interpretations and dramatic style but adding no new information. After describing Joseph as a hard-working young man, for example, he comments:

The sweat of his face, therefore, was at once a necessity and a salutation: a requisite for the family welfare and comfort; a protection from enervating dreams. No husbandman of all that neighborhood was more industrious than he; and, except for the hatred bred against him by false teachers and their followers, no one would have a better reputation (p. 46).

In 1902 Joseph and Heman C. Smith, historians for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, published their four-volume *History of the Church of Jesus Christ*

of *Latter Day Saints* (Lamoni, Iowa). Their basic source for the New York period was the "History of Joseph Smith," which they repeated in almost exact detail. In 1922 Joseph Fielding Smith, Mormon apostle and Church historian, published the first edition of his *Essentials in Church History*. It has been frequently updated and republished, but Elder Smith's treatment of the New York period was essentially that of his father's uncle, Joseph Smith.

The most important Mormon history to come from the press since Joseph Smith's "History of the Church" was B. H. Roberts' six-volume *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century I*, published in 1930. Most of this work had been published serially from 1909 to 1915 in the historical journal *Americana*, under the title "History of the Mormon Church." (Some of it had been published even before in some "period histories.") Roberts made every effort to base his work on all available evidence, both Mormon and non-Mormon, and to correlate seemingly conflicting testimonies in such a way as to present an accurate narrative. He was acquainted with the works of all the important anti-Mormon writers, and frequently used them when he thought them reliable. He also went beyond Joseph and Lucy Smith in presenting background material on the paternal ancestry of the prophet. Roberts readily admitted that there were discrepancies in some of the accounts of Joseph's early activities. A note at the end of Chapter VIII, for example, comments on variations in the accounts of bringing home the gold plates, suggesting that these variations are not serious and should actually be expected. Roberts also went into detail in his explanations of the translation of the Book of Mormon, the organization of the Church, and the background of a few of the people who became associated with Joseph Smith during the New York period.

Roberts' history, nevertheless, fits into the tradition being discussed. Although he drew much from the writings of some non-Mormons, from letters and other documents in the Church Historian's Office, and from an address by David Whitmer, his major sources of information were the writings of Joseph and Lucy Smith, and he accepted the writings of Joseph as unquestionably accurate. Moreover, the work was apologetic: many of Roberts' interpretations were specifically designed to

answer charges by the non-Mormon writers described above. More than five pages were devoted to a rebuttal of the charges that Joseph Smith's ancestors were restless, illiterate, and credulous.²⁴

The first Mormon biography of Joseph Smith to be circulated widely outside the Church was John Henry Evans' *Joseph Smith An American Prophet*, published in 1933. Evans wrote in his introduction: "I have tried to give a scientific treatment of Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet—that is, to present the available facts, without smothering these facts in opinion. This, I believe has never been done before" (p. vii). This attempt at scientific detachment was not completely successful: the reader will note several places in which Evans added his personal interpretation of Mormonism, fitting Joseph Smith's history into the pattern. His style is also disappointing to scholars, for the writing was popularized and lacked bibliographical footnotes and references. Evans showed a lack of sophistication in his historianship. For example, he told of the organization of the Church on April 6, 1830, then explained in some detail the importance and religious significance of the Church's name, especially of the word "saint." But he failed to recognize that the name of the Church in 1830 was simply "The Church of Christ"; its present name was not adopted until 1838. Evans' general analysis of church history follows the traditional pattern, his basic reliance was on the traditional sources, and his book fits the basic pattern of Mormon defensive writing.

Three years after the appearance of Evans' biography, there appeared the first edition of a book which was to have a greater impact on the youth of the Church than any other history: William E. Berrett's *The Restored Church*. Originally written at the request of the Church's Department of Education, it has been revised frequently and has been used as the basic Church history text in the seminary program for more than thirty years. Written in a warm and appealing style, and based primarily on Smith and Roberts, it is not as argumentative or defensive as Roberts. Berrett also tried to place the Church in its broader historical setting with a discussion of frontier America and the role of religion on the frontier.

²⁴Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, Vol. 1, pp. 23-28.

Additional books which treat the New York period from this defensive point of view include Willard Bean, *ABC History of Palmyra* (Palmyra, 1938); Preston Nibley, *Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City, 1946); Pearson Corbett, *Hyrum Smith, Patriarch* (Salt Lake City, 1963); and Ivan J. Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration* (Provo, Utah, 1967). In each of these works, the material on Mormon origins may be traced to the same sources and their purposes are basically the same.²⁵

The "Socio-Psychological" approach. Another school of historians tries to analyze the sociological patterns which affected the Mormon Prophet and, in some case, the psychological forces which may have accounted for his actions. While they usually conclude, along with the followers of Hurlburt-Howe, that Mormonism was founded on a deception, their individual paths to that conclusion are more original. Taken together, they form a body of literature on Mormon origins that stands apart from the older traditions.

Perhaps the earliest of these writers was I. Woodbridge Riley, who published *The Founder of Mormonism* in 1902. A strictly psychological approach to Joseph Smith, Riley's *Founder of Mormonism* boldly began with the thesis that the "state of his body goes far to explain the state of his mind, and his ancestry [explains] both. Like the distorted views of his grandfather, 'Crook-necked Smith,' Joseph's mental abnormalities are to be connected with physical ills" (pp. 3-4). Riley then proceeded to psychoanalyze not only the Prophet, but his progenitors as well! Reading between the lines of Lucy Smith's work, and of her father's narrative history, Riley concluded that Joseph's whole family were natural heirs to the traits of illiteracy, restlessness, and credulity (p. 12). In the visions of Joseph Smith's father Riley saw the basis for what he considered some of the hallucinations of Joseph Smith as well as the source for certain episodes in the Book of Mormon. He did not consider Joseph an intentional imposter. Rather, he explained Joseph Smith's visions in terms of abnormal psy-

²⁵It should perhaps be noted that Corbett's biography of Hyrum Smith contains unsupported interpolations which seek to reconstruct obscure and sometimes unimportant events. His intimate description of the family scene as Joseph Smith told them the story of the Angel Moroni is not really supported in detail by the documents (pp. 28-31).

chology. From his mother Joseph inherited a "liability to neural instability." The Prophet was described as addicted to drunkenness, one of the causes of his frequent "seizures." More specifically, Riley saw Joseph as an epileptic, and he read into the history of Joseph and his ancestors all the symptoms of epilepsy. He explained the Book of Mormon in terms of Joseph's religious environment, family background, and personal experiences. In support of this interpretation, Riley accurately demonstrated that contemporaries often attributed a Hebraic origin to the American Indian. According to Riley, the Book of Mormon was a clue to the Prophet's mentality. Its four chief marks were "a redundant style, fragmentary information, a fanciful archaeology, and an unsystematic theology" (p. 168)—all evidences of the fancifulness and restlessness of Joseph.²⁶

MORE RECENT STUDIES OF JOSEPH SMITH

In 1912 Eduard Meyer, an eminent German scholar who had visited Utah, published *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen*.²⁷ Meyer had access to most of the standard Mormon and non-Mormon sources, but was particularly impressed with Riley's psychological explanation. Like Riley, he rejected the Spaulding theory. He was generous to the "three witnesses," who, he explained, actually saw the gold plates, even though they did not really exist, because desire and promises led to a common vision "conjured up to them by the anticipation of the long preparation, the pregnant atmosphere of miracles through which they lived, their prayer together, and the Prophet's power of suggestion" (p. 9). He was also some-

²⁶Latter-day Saint historians might learn much from the insights of their psychologist brethren. A psychoanalytical biography of Joseph Smith of the stature and depth of *Young Man Luther* by Erik Erikson would help to illuminate the process by which Joseph's teenage religious conflicts ultimately led to a spiritual solution of major consequence. Just as Erikson depicts the identity struggle of a young great man who ultimately established a new branch of Christendom, so the use of psychoanalysis as a historical tool might demonstrate how young Joseph faced the problems of human existence in the most forward terms of his era. Young Joseph was not pathological as Riley supposed, but the historian must still consider the possibility that Joseph's search for truth was meaningfully related to his psychological conflicts. See Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1962).

²⁷This is now available in English: Eduard Meyer, *The Origin and History of the Mormons, With Reflections on the Beginnings of Islam and Christianity*, translated by Heinz F. Rahde and Eugene Seach (Salt Lake City, 1961).

what generous to Joseph Smith, whose religious environment with its emphasis on the Old Testament and upon visions explains how a young man could really believe that God had called him to be a prophet.

Fawn M. Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* (New York, 1945) was an Alfred A. Knopf prize-winning biography of Joseph Smith. Mrs. Brodie relied on the traditional Mormon and non-Mormon sources. For the New York period, she provided little new evidence except for a controversial transcript of an alleged trial in 1826 in which Joseph Smith was found guilty of disturbing the peace. Seeking to paint a preconceived portrait of Joseph Smith, Mrs. Brodie ignored important conflicting sources. Her views are brilliantly presented, however, and give the appearance of being well researched and documented. For want of a better scholarly biography, *No Man Knows My History* continues to serve as a standard reference for professional textbook writers who include a section or chapter on early Mormon history.

Mrs. Brodie began her work with the standard Hurlburt-Howe image of the Smith family, then proceeded to dramatize the intense religious spirit which pervaded western New York in Joseph Smith's time. She rejected completely the Spaulding manuscript as the source of the Book of Mormon, attributing the latter wholly to Joseph. In the tradition of Arbaugh and Riley, but with more depth and clarity, she analyzed the social and religious environment of Joseph Smith as it related to the Book of Mormon. Even though she considered young Joseph a likeable ne'er-do-well, she did not consider him ignorant or unimaginative at the time the Book of Mormon was written. She demonstrated that he had every opportunity to encounter the idea that American Indians were of Jewish origin. Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* may have been the original source for Joseph's ideas, she speculated, but it was only a basic source and he built upon it. Other contemporary ideas and problems provided the source for other parts of the book. His father's dreams were the source of the Lehi vision; anti-Catholic feelings the source of the idea that much had been lost from the Bible; and anti-masonry the source of warnings against secret societies. The Book of Mormon was, for her, a product of its times. She expressed surprise that American literary historians had ignored it, for it was "one

of the earliest examples of frontier fiction, the first long Yankee narrative that owes nothing to English literary fashions" (p. 67). She viewed Joseph Smith's role of Prophet as something he slipped into quite accidentally as he advanced from one deception to another.²⁸

Sooner or later, a non-Mormon student of Frederick Jackson Turner was certain to try his hand at Mormon history. It was Turner who had developed the famous thesis that certain basic American institutions and characteristics were the result of the frontier experience. Dean D. McBrien, who in 1924 had followed Turner all the way to Logan, Utah, to take his course in the history of the frontier at Utah State University, later completed a dissertation for George Washington University on "The Influence of the Frontier on Joseph Smith." More than eighty pages of this little-used dissertation are concerned with the New York phase of Mormonism. McBrien, in a typically Turnerian interpretation, stresses the role of the physical, social, and cultural environment of the New York frontier in the origins of Mormonism:

Joseph Smith was an American, an American Westerner. As such it is not to be wondered that there should be found blended within him a mixture of the ideas, principles, emotions, and crude conceptions of American frontier life of a hundred years ago (pp. ii-iii).

Many Mormon writers, too, have, in a somewhat Turnerian fashion, related the history of the Church to the history of the American frontier. William E. Berrett made such an attempt in 1936, but perhaps the clearest Mormon statement of the "frontier theory" of Mormon origins comes from Milton R. Hunter's *The Mormons and the American Frontier* (Salt Lake City, 1940). Hunter accepted the Turner thesis and saw the

²⁸After the appearance of *No Man Knows My History*, Hugh Nibley published the pamphlet, *No Ma'am, That's Not History* (Salt Lake City, 1946). Although a hurried reply to Fawn Brodie, this booklet contained an incisive and often humorous commentary on Mrs. Brodie's reasoning, and was applauded in many quarters. In "Censoring Joseph Smith's Story," a 1961 series of articles in *The Improvement Era*, Nibley wrote a more careful step-by-step refutation of several anti-Mormon writers. In the same tradition was a 1967 booklet, *Exploding the Myth about Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet*, published privately in New York City by F. L. Stewart. Miss Stewart refutes Mrs. Brodie not only with logic but also by showing weaknesses in documentation and providing further historical material. Although some reviewers have asserted that Miss Stewart made a few historical blunders of her own, the work has value in helping to achieve a balanced view.

Mormon experience as definitely a frontier (and therefore praiseworthy) experience.

In the early 1950's the view that Mormonism was a frontier religion was challenged by two important studies. Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, 1950), argued that the Palmyra area was not a frontier by the time the Smiths arrived. It was "less isolated and provincial, more vigorous and cosmopolitan, than Vermont. It was reaching economic stability" (p. 40). Nor was Mormonism a frontier religion; its early converts were not frontiersmen. Mormonism did not originate in the pioneering section of western New York, and its early recruits came from the longest-settled neighborhoods of the region (p. 146). Similar conclusions were reached independently by S. George Ellsworth, whose Ph.D. dissertation, "A History of Mormon Missions in the United States and Canada, 1830-1860," was completed at Berkeley in 1951.²⁹

Other approaches. A somewhat different view of Mormon origins may be seen through the experiences of someone other than Joseph Smith. Unfortunately, biographies and autobiographies of those who joined the Church during this period are sadly lacking. A few useful details, however, may be gained by reading such works as Parley P. Pratt's *Autobiography* (Salt Lake City, 1874); Stanley Gunn's *Oliver Cowdery* (Salt Lake City, 1962); and F. Mark McKiernan, "The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer, 1793-1876" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1968).

Additional information about the period may be found in various collections of readings published during the past few years. In 1953 William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton published the first of their three-volume *Readings In L.D.S. Church History* (Salt Lake City), which contained excerpts from the standard pro-Mormon sources already mentioned.

²⁹A recent essay has challenged these conclusions. In "The Social Sources of Mormonism," *Church History*, March 1968, pp. 50-79, Mario De Pillis criticized both Cross and Ellsworth for relying on a too-narrow definition of the frontier, and for not interpreting accurately the attributes of the early converts to Mormonism. According to De Pillis, western New York was still a social frontier at the time Mormonism originated, and early Mormons were still facing frontier-type problems in spite of the maturing economy outlined by Cross and Ellsworth.

Among the Mormons, edited by William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen (New York, 1958), contains a number of valuable documents from sources less readily available to the general reader. A more extensive collection of sources relating to the Book of Mormon is found in Francis W. Kirkham's two-volume work *A New Witness for Christ in America* (Independence, Mo., 1941 and Salt Lake City, 1952). Kirkham made an exhaustive effort to collect every available early newspaper account or other reference to the Book of Mormon, as well as later narratives, both pro- and anti-Mormon, which might throw light upon its origin. His basic purpose was to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon by showing the inconsistency of the anti-Mormon documents. His documents are all valuable, but they would be more useful if the work had been better organized and clearer distinction made between the documents and the editorializing.

The most recent approach to Mormon origins is Milton Backman's *American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, 1965), which relates Mormonism more fully than previous histories to the religious environment in which it arose.

WANTED: MORE RESEARCH AND WRITING ON MORMON ORIGINS IN NEW YORK

In writing of those who were members of the Church in December, 1830, Joseph Smith affectionately looked back on "the little flock, which in all, from Colesville to Canandaigua, New York, numbered about seventy members."³⁰ It is understandable that in 1830 little was being written or said about Joseph Smith, outside his immediate environment, and that even less was being said about his small band of followers. As Mormonism increased in size, power, and significance, Joseph Smith became more important not only to his own people but to Americans in general. It is now time to raise the question of whether enough has been written about the ordinary people involved in the beginning of the Church—with the purpose of understanding more about their backgrounds, their possible contributions, and the impact the new movement had on them. This question leads directly to a larger question:

³⁰DHC, Vol. 1, p. 132.

Is there not a need for new research and fresh literary approaches to all aspects of Mormon history?

In order to comprehend the history of any movement or institution, one must be familiar with the context in which it grew. Most twentieth-century scholars who have written on Mormonism have attempted to relate Joseph Smith and the early Church to their environment, but for the most part this has been done very superficially. There has been no major treatise designed specifically to place Mormonism in its political, economic, and social setting. Cross and others have suggested some comparisons between the New York revival and those of Kentucky, showing that the New York experiences were less hysterical in nature.³¹ Further studies of the beliefs of people in western New York and their comparison with Joseph Smith's ideas would be welcome.

Inasmuch as Mormonism eventually became a strong political force in its own right, a major treatment of the political setting in which Mormonism arose would be helpful. While we already know the chief political problems of the time, and secondary sources could probably give us much of the political history of western New York and Ohio, there is little available that brings it all together with specific reference to its impact on the infant Mormon Church and some of its members.³² In what way did the political climate help or hinder the spread of Mormonism? Did mistrust of the other groups help prepare the atmosphere for the Mormon persecutions?³³ What was the political climate of western New York, and what were the political philosophies of the first Mormon converts? To what degree were they influenced by the trends toward greater democracy, and how might this have influenced their behavior as Church members?

A related, but perhaps larger, set of questions has to do with the economic and social background of Mormonism.

³¹See also Mario S. De Pillis, "Mormon Communitarianism, 1826-1846" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1961).

³²Some ideas are provided in G. Homer Durham, *Joseph Smith, Prophet-Statesman* (Salt Lake City, 1944); and Hyrum L. Andrus, "The Second American Revolution: Era of Preparation," *BYU Studies*, Vols. 1-2 (Autumn 1959-Winter 1960), pp. 71-100.

³³A good starting point might be David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 47 (September, 1960), pp. 205-224.

What was the actual economic structure of western New York, and how did the small band of Mormons fit into it, both before and after they joined the Church? To what degree was western New York still a social or economic frontier, and what difference did that make as far as the prospective Mormon converts were concerned? Where is there a description of the effect of the Erie Canal upon the region, not only economically but also in terms of increased communication and hence the better circulation of ideas? The Erie Canal certainly increased the flow of traffic between eastern and western New York and at the same time made traffic between New York and Ohio much less difficult. Did this facilitate the communication of ideas between eastern Ohio, a "hotbed" of the Disciples of Christ, and western New York, where Mormonism originated? What did the early Mormons do for a living, and what was their general economic and social status? Where did they come from, and how long had they been in New York? To what churches, if any, did they belong, and what religious and other social ideas did they bring with them into Mormonism? Why were they converted, and how long did they remain in the Church? Where were future converts living at the time, and how do all of the above questions apply to them?³⁴ How well were they prepared for Mormonism as it developed through the 1830's? Some historians may even wish to speculate as to whether Mormonism could have succeeded as well had Joseph Smith chosen to remain in New York rather than migrate to Ohio in January of 1831.

To help answer the foregoing questions two projects are indispensable: (1) a biographical profile of early church members, and (2) an analysis of the status of the infant church as its leaders prepared to leave New York. Well-researched biographical sketches on each of the early converts would be an invaluable asset. They should include not only the "little flock" struggling to get the Church started in 1830 but also others who came into the Church during the next few years. A more sympathetic biography of Joseph Smith that matches in literary quality the skillful presentation of Fawn Brodie is needed, as is a more accurate and objective biography of Hyrum Smith. Richard L. Anderson has been working on a

³⁴Excellent introductions to these problems are given in the Cross and Ellsworth studies, cited above.

study of the "Three Witnesses"—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris; it is hoped that his proposed book will include the period of Mormon origins as well as their later experiences. Others converted during the New York period who warrant biographical studies are Joseph Smith, Sr., Lucy Mack Smith, William Smith, Samuel Smith, and Parley P. Pratt.³⁵

A start toward these biographical studies may be seen in the fact that at least fifty-five of the seventy New York Mormons are identifiable through the listings given in the "History of Joseph Smith." Brief and generally inadequate biographical sketches may be found on only twenty-three of these people in Andrew Jenson's *L.D.S. Biographical Encyclopedia*. From these sketches one may draw a few interesting conclusions, although not with any assurance that this represents an accurate social profile. The average age of the group was thirty-one.³⁶ The oldest person, Joseph Smith, Sr., was fifty-nine, and the youngest, Porter Rockwell, was fifteen. Fifteen of the twenty-three were thirty years of age or under. The occupations of most were not given by Jenson but there was at least one shoemaker, one physician, a miller, and several farmers. It might also be said that the new Church was a family-and-friend affair. Of the fifty-five identifiable persons, there was a direct family-friend relationship with the Smiths of at least thirty-one. The Smith family included Joseph Sr., Lucy Mack, Joseph Jr., Hyrum, Jerusha (Hyrum's wife), Katherine, William, Don Carlos, and Emma (Joseph's wife). The Knight family had long been on friendly terms with the Smiths, and the names listed include Joseph Sr., Polly (his wife), Joseph Jr., Newell, and Sally (his wife). Emily Coburn was a sister of Newell's wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Hezakah Peck were probably related to Polly Peck, the wife of Joseph, Sr. Another close associate of Joseph Smith's was, of course, Oliver Cowdery. Cowdery was a good friend of the Whitmer family, and eventually married Elizabeth Ann Whitmer. Other members of the Whit-

³⁵Two important early leaders have been the subject of book size biographies: The McKiernan dissertation on Sidney Rigdon, cited above, and Harold Schindler, *Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder* (Salt Lake City, 1966). There are also theses at BYU on Emma Smith and T. B. Marsh, and T. Edgar Lyon's thesis at the University of Chicago on Orson Pratt.

³⁶This does not include Joseph Knight Sr., whose birthdate is not known.

mer family included Peter Sr., Mary (his wife), Peter Jr., Christian, Anne (his wife), John, Jacob, Elizabeth (his wife), Catherine, and David. Catherine Whitmer was married to Hiram Page. Martin Harris, of course, was also a friend of the Smiths. Undoubtedly other members of the "little flock" were close friends or relatives of some of these families and when the list of identifiable persons includes five Jolleys, four Rockwells, two Culvers, and the Pratt brothers, Parley and Orson, one is indeed impressed with the importance of family and friends in the early growth of Mormonism. When it is also remembered that the real beginning of the Church in Ohio was the result of the conversion of Parley P. Pratt's friend Sidney Rigdon and his closest associates, the point becomes even more impressive.

Needed also is an analysis of the status of the Church as the New York period came to a close. It is important to know, not only how the Church was organized, what the members believed, and how large it was, but also the way the Church developed later in order to understand what new directions it took and what factors remained constant from the New York period on. A brief, preliminary analysis suggests that the infant Church consisted of some seventy members, many of whom (and we do not know how many) were preparing to leave their homes for Ohio early in 1831. The Church was called the Church of Christ, although its members were nicknamed "Mormonites" by outsiders. The organization was very simple, the leadership consisting of only a First and Second Elder, but the basis for a more elaborate organization had been established. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were called apostles, and Church members had already been given to understand that a Quorum of Twelve was soon to be established. The offices of elder, priest, teacher, and deacon had been "restored," and their duties described, and the foundation for a broad missionary program had already been laid. It is not known whether Church members were aware of Joseph Smith's First Vision, but it is clear that they considered him a Prophet who received divine revelation and therefore were willing to submit themselves to his direction. They accepted as scripture not only the Bible but also the Book of Mormon, which they believed had been translated by Joseph Smith through divine power.

It has been suggested that Mormon doctrine did not really take shape until after Joseph Smith moved to Ohio and came under the influence of the Campbellite preacher, Sidney Rigdon. But many of the beliefs and practices which became permanent parts of the Mormon faith were in the Book of Mormon or in some of Joseph's early revelations, and were thus part of Mormonism even before Joseph Smith left New York. Among the more important of these concepts were the following: faith, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, the bestowal of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, priesthood authority, the importance of missionary work, the fall of man, doctrine of the atonement of Christ, millennialism, free agency, spiritual gifts, America as a chosen land and the site of the New Jerusalem, and the universality of the Gospel. As Marvin Hill demonstrates in his article in this issue of *BYU Studies*, many of the basic tenets of Mormonism were rooted in the New York period. On the other hand, New York Church members did not teach several doctrines and practices which later became part of the faith: tithing, "preexistence," the "three degrees of glory," eternal marriage, eternal progression, salvation for the dead, plural marriage, and various far-reaching developments in Church organization.

The foregoing material has suggested some of the broad, general approaches which may be taken toward a study of Mormon origins. There are more specific questions which also will bear further study.

1. What additional information can be found on the activities of Joseph Smith and his family between 1820 and 1830? Up to 1827, at least, the sources are sketchy, and more details are needed. Who were their friends? What did they read? Where did they go to church?

2. What transpired between Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in December 1830? Did Rigdon go to New York with the idea of trying to get Joseph Smith to move to Kirtland? Had he deliberately prepared Kirtland, in any way, for the arrival of the New York Prophet?

3. How many Mormons left New York for Kirtland early in 1831? What did it mean to them to leave?

4. What do we know about the early anti-Mormon writers

who attacked Joseph Smith and his followers? What can we say about their background, personal qualifications, and motivations? Richard Anderson explores some aspects of this question in his essay below.

5. Are we Mormons willing to admit that some of our writers have made mistakes in trying to reconcile conflicting accounts of Joseph Smith's early experiences? A case in point is B. H. Roberts' description of the setting for Joseph Smith's First Vision. Roberts based his conclusion upon an attempted correlation of the accounts of Joseph Smith, William Smith, and Oliver Cowdery.³⁷ He said that it was in 1820 that a certain Reverend Lane so affected Joseph Smith by his preaching that he was induced to utter the prayer which resulted in that First Vision. In the original sources, however, neither Cowdery nor William Smith mentions the 1820 vision specifically. Both of them place the Reverend Lane in the vicinity of Palmyra in 1823, relating him to the background of the visions that announced the Book of Mormon. Neither Joseph Smith nor his mother mentioned Reverend Lane. It is probable that Roberts came to his conclusion because the revival described by Cowdery seemed similar to the 1820 religious excitement later described by Joseph Smith. Clearing up the confusion of dates does not seem as important here as a frank recognition that there is such confusion. The inconsistencies in early sources do not affect the credibility of Joseph Smith, but our failure to discuss them perpetuates the myth that Mormon writers are not willing "to face the facts."

6. Who was the Reverend Mr. Lane, and when was he in Palmyra? A recent article by a Presbyterian minister, Wesley Walters, casts doubts on the claim that Reverend Lane was in the Palmyra vicinity in 1820.³⁸ Since Lane has been closely identified with Mormon origins, it becomes essential that we know more about him and his movements. Larry Porter, in his fine essay in this issue, effectively challenges some of Walters' inferences by showing the possibility that Lane may have passed through the Palmyra vicinity in 1820. But more research is needed before a final conclusion can be

³⁷Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, Vol. 1, p. 52.

³⁸Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from Palmyra (N. Y.) Revival," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 10 (Fall, 1967), pp. 227-244.

reached. If Reverend Lane kept a journal, its discovery would prove invaluable in helping construct a more accurate picture of the background of Mormon origins.

7. What evidence do we have, other than the word of Joseph Smith, that there was "an unusual excitement on the subject of religion" in the vicinity of Palmyra in 1820? Up to this point little such evidence has been uncovered, and Walters challenged the story in the article referred to above. Milton Backman, however, has discovered interesting new material which he presents in his important article on the historical setting of the First Vision.

8. What information do we have to help us locate correctly the important sites of early Mormon history? Is the present Peter Whitmer home on the actual site of the organization of the Church? Is the present "sacred grove" the actual grove where Joseph Smith had his First Vision? Is the present Smith family home the actual place in which Joseph saw the Angel Moroni? In this issue T. Edgar Lyon has raised some questions which amount to a plea for accuracy in Mormon historical endeavors.

9. *Mormonism Unveiled* presented many statements from Joseph Smith's contemporaries damaging to his character. While such statements are open to suspicion because of the way in which they were collected, the question must still be raised as to what other contemporary evidence is available concerning the youthful character of the Mormon Prophet? Is it possible to find contemporary statements about young Joseph that are more reliable? If he was really obscure before 1830, the search may be difficult. But it should continue. There is some evidence that before he gained notoriety for his religious experiences Joseph Smith and his family were considered honorable and respectable. The "Mormon Origins" group is making every effort to locate further evidence. The search should also continue for early statements regarding the Book of Mormon, particularly the 1827 newspaper article mentioned by Stephen S. Harding.

10. What contemporary evidence, other than Mormon writings, do we have that the New York Mormons were persecuted before leaving the state? Who persecuted them? How? What reasons did they give for so doing?

11. What verifiable accounts do we have of the various court trials experienced by Joseph Smith in New York? Fawn Brodie has published a document purporting to be the transcript of an 1826 trial in which Joseph Smith was found guilty of disturbing the peace, but its authenticity is not beyond question. By the same token Joseph Smith tells the story of two trials in 1830 which ended in his acquittal, but his writings and an 1844 Nauvoo speech by his lawyer, John S. Reid, are the only sources for these.³⁹ Is it possible to find corroborating evidence for any of these trials or for any other legal difficulties he may have had in New York? An essay on such problems would indeed be a valuable addition to the literature on early Mormon history.

12. Finally, what can we discover about the writing of Joseph Smith's own history of this period? When did he first begin to keep notes? How did he keep them? Who were his scribes and secretaries, and what part did they play in the keeping of the notes and the writing of the history? Dean Jessee, a member of the LDS Church Historian's staff, has done some valuable sleuthing on this problem, the results of which are presented below.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The questions raised above only suggest some of the research which yet needs to be done on the history of Mormon origins in New York. It is startling to think that the "little flock" of seventy people could require, at this late date, so much historical attention. But their significance exceeds their number, and the historian is compelled to explore every aspect of their history.

It has been demonstrated that the sources for the period are scarce. Hopefully the new information recovered by the authors of the articles in this issue of *BYU Studies* will demonstrate that new sources can be discovered and will motivate younger scholars to join the search. It is probable that attics, basements, and family trunks still harbor journals, letters, and notes that would throw light on Mormon origins. A further examination of libraries in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio

³⁹DHC, Vol. 1, pp. 88-96; *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5 (June 1, 1844), pp. 549-552.

could well uncover newspapers, pamphlets, and even diaries that have previously been passed over.⁴⁰ The vast resources of the Church genealogical program could be marshaled to trace the history of some of the earliest converts. The objective, of course, is to amass as large a body as possible of primary material that will become an indispensable tool for Mormon and non-Mormon alike in their further quest for the truth about Mormon origins. When this has been done, we should then concentrate on doing the same thing for the next period.

⁴⁰While preparing this article, one of the writers located in the Manuscripts Division of the New York Public Library a diary of James Gordon Bennett, founder of the New York *Herald*, of a journey through New York during the summer of 1831. One tantalizing entry is dated Geneva, New York, August 7, 1831: "*Mormonism*. Old Smith [Joseph Smith, Sr.] was a healer—a grand story teller—very glib—was a vender [?]⁴¹—made gingerbread and butter mints—Young Smith was careless, idle, idolent fellow—22 years old—brought up to live by his wits—which means a broker of small wants—Harris was a hardy industrious farmer of Palmyra—with some money—could speak off the Bible by heart—Henry [*sic*] Rigdon a parson in general—smart fellow—he is the author of the Bible—they dig first for money—a great many hills . . . turned into a religious plot and gave out the golden plates . . . Mormonites went to Ohio because the people here would not pay any attention to them. . . ."

The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision

Dean C. Jessee*

On June 11, 1839, less than two months after his arrival in Illinois from confinement in a Missouri jail, and one month after moving his family into a small log house near Commerce, Illinois, Joseph Smith commenced dictating his history to his clerk James Mulholland.¹ At that time some nineteen years had elapsed since Joseph's First Vision,² and nine years had passed since the revelation commanding him to keep a history.³ Among the causes of this delay were the frustrating circumstances that confronted the Prophet in writing his history—circumstances that did not end in June of 1839.

By October 29 of that year, when Joseph left Nauvoo for Washington, D.C., to present the Missouri grievances of his

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¹Joseph Smith, "History of the Church," (MS, LDS Historian's Library) C-1, p. 954. See also Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1948), Vol. 3, p. 375. (Cited hereafter as *DHC*.)

²On this point critics have questioned the reliability of the First Vision account on the ground that the late start on the history combined with the lack of reference to the vision in early Mormon publications indicates an ulterior motive on the part of Joseph Smith in presenting the vision to the world. Fawn Brodie in her biography of the Prophet suggests that "the awesome vision he described in later years may have been . . . sheer invention, created some time after 1834 when the need arose for a magnificent tradition. . . ." *No Man Knows My History* (New York, 1963), p. 25. Others have asserted that lack of reference to the First Vision in early Mormon publications, "refutes the story that the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith in 1820," and "absolutely proves that the early members of the Mormon Church had no knowledge of a vision." Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith's Strange Account of the First Vision* (Salt Lake City, n.d.), p. 3. See also, Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from Palmyra (N.Y.) Revival," *Bulletin of Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 10 (Fall 1967), p. 228.

³The opening words of the revelation given to Joseph Smith at the organization of the Church on April 6, 1830 were: "Behold, there shall be a record kept among you. . . ." Doctrine and Covenants 21:1.

people before the federal government, only fifty-nine pages of his history had been written; and six days after his departure, his scribe James Mulholland died.⁴ When Joseph returned to Nauvoo in March 1840, he lamented the passing of his "faithful scribe," and expressed disappointment that an adequate record of his Washington trip had not been kept: "I depended on Dr. Foster to keep my daily journal during this journey, but he has failed me."⁵ Robert B. Thompson, who was appointed General Church Clerk on October 3, 1840, continued writing the history where Mulholland left off; however, his untimely death on August 27, 1841 saw only sixteen pages added to the manuscript.⁶ By the time Willard Richards was appointed private secretary to the Prophet and General Church Clerk in December 1841, a mere 157 pages of a history that eventually numbered more than two thousand, had been written.⁷

Such were the conditions the Prophet Joseph faced in writing a connected chronicle of his past, that two and a half years before his death he apologetically explained:

Since I have been engaged in laying the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints I have been prevented in various ways from continuing my Journal and the History, in a manner satisfactory to myself, or in justice to the cause. Long imprisonments, vexatious and long continued Law Suits - The treachery of some of my Clerks; the death of others; and the poverty of myself and Brethren from continued plunder and driving, have prevented my handing down to posterity a connected memorandum of events desirable to all lovers of truth. . . .⁸

⁴*DHC*, Vol. 4, pp. 88-89.

⁵Smith, "History," C-1, p. 1023. See also *DHC*, Vol. 4, p. 89.

⁶*DHC*, Vol. 4, p. 89.

⁷*Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 470. The manuscript of the "History" shows that the first 59 pages were written by James Mulholland, that Robert B. Thompson wrote at least part of the next 16, and that William W. Phelps had written 82 pages before Willard Richards began writing. It was not until after Richards' appointment in December 1841 that any significant progress was made on the written history.

⁸Smith, "History," C-1, p. 1260. See also *DHC*, Vol. 4, p. 470. Speaking to the newly appointed Twelve in February 1835, Joseph Smith remarked ". . . if I now had in my possession every decision which has been had upon important items of doctrine and duties, since the commencement of this work, I would not part with them for any sum of money; but we have neglected to take minutes of such things, thinking perhaps that they would never benefit us afterwards. . . . and now we cannot bear record to the church and to the world of the great and glorious manifestations which have been made to us, with that degree of power and authority we otherwise could, if we now had these things to publish abroad." Smith, "History," B-1, p. 575.

The factors that retarded Joseph Smith's progress on his history did not prevent periodic beginnings. The Prophet added:

I have continued to keep up a Journal in the best manner my circumstances would allow, and dictate for my history from time to time, as I have had opportunity, so that the labors and sufferings of the first Elders and Saints of this last kingdom might not wholly be lost to the world.⁹

On at least three occasions prior to 1839 Joseph Smith began writing his history.¹⁰ The earliest of these is a six-page account recorded on three leaves of a ledger book, written between the summer of 1831 and November 1832. An analysis of the handwriting shows that the narrative was penned by Frederick G. Williams, scribe to the Prophet and counselor in the First Presidency. Inasmuch as Williams was converted to Mormonism in the fall of 1830 and immediately left on a mission to Missouri, the writing of this history could not have preceded his meeting with Joseph Smith in mid-1831. Nor was the history written after November 27, 1832, since on that date the ledger book in which it was written was converted to a letter book for recording important historical Church documents. There are many evidences for this assertion.

First, although they were later cut from the volume, the three leaves containing the history match the cut edges and quality and markings of the paper of the page ends. The terminal letters of words severed when the pages were removed also match. The cut page stubs immediately precede the November 27, 1832, letter entry on the first of the remaining pages.

Second, the numbering sequences indicate this arrangement. The pages of the history were numbered one through six and the November 27 letter begins on page "1a." Both the history and the letter are in Williams' handwriting. He would not have needed to begin the letter page with "1a" had there

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰The Prophet did very little writing himself. On July 5, 1839, he records, "I was dictating history. I say dictating, for I seldom use the pen myself. I always dictate all my communications, but employ a scribe to write them." "History," C-1, p. 963. See also *DHC*, Vol. 4, p. 1. The extreme scarcity of holographic material among the documents originated by Joseph Smith confirms this statement. Joseph Smith's authorship of the three historical accounts portrayed in these pages must be regarded within this framework.

not been other numbered pages preceding it. This brings up the third point.

In addition to the commencement of the letter book on November 27, 1832, Joseph Smith also started a daily journal. On that day he records having purchased a book for the purpose of keeping "a minute account of all things that come under my observation."¹¹ The beginning of the journal and letter book on the same day is of more than coincidental significance. It not only provides the terminal point in dating the earliest known historical narrative of the Prophet's life, but establishes the start of an important precedent in preserving the history of the Church. By recording important historical Church documents in the letter book, and his own life's events in the journal, the Prophet set a precedent that continued throughout the remainder of his life. Only the failure of his scribes, or the intrusion of other circumstances beyond his control, interrupted the continuation of this precedent. Significantly, these records provided important sources for the later writing of Joseph's official history.¹²

The 1831-32 history transliterated here contains the earliest known account of Joseph Smith's First Vision.¹³

A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr an account of his marvilous experience and of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Chist the son of the living God of whom he beareth record and also an account of the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time according as the Lord
 firstly
 brought forth and established by his hand ^ he receiving the testamony from on high secondly the ministering of Angels thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministering of Aangels to adminster the letter of the Gospel - the Law and commandments as they were given unto him - and the ordinencs, forthly a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinance from on high to preach the Gospel in the administration and demonstration of the spirit the Kees

¹¹Joseph Smith, "Journal" (MS, LDS Historian's Library), 1832-1834, p. 1.

¹²These records were the basic sources for the later "official" history.

¹³"Kirtland Letter Book" (MS, LDS Historian's Library), 1829-1835, pp. 1-6. This account is presented here with the punctuation and spelling of the original. This account has been mistakenly dated "near 1833" because of the addition of a loose page with Williams' signature under the date of 1833. This page, which is not of the same paper stock as the other pages of the ledger, was added at a later date.

of the Kingdom of God conferred upon him and the continuation of the blessings of God to him &c-----

State

I was born in the town of Charon in the ^{State} of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December A D 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instructing me

the in ^{the} christian religion at the age of about ten years my Father Joseph Smith Siegnior moved to Palmyra Ontario County in the State of New York and being in indigent circumstances were obliged to labour hard for the support of a large Family having nine children and as it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the benefit of an education suffice it to say I was nearly instructed in reading

rules

~~and~~ writing and the ground ^{rules} of Arithmatic which constuted my whole literary acquirements. At about the age of twelve years my mind became seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul which led me to searching the Scriptures believing as I was taught, that they contained the word of God thus applying myself to them and my intimate acquaintance with those of differant denominations led me to marvel exceedingly for I

they did not ~~adorn~~

discovered that ^{they did not} ~~instead~~ of adorning their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository this was a grief to my Soul thus from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind the contentions and divisions the wickness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the ~~of~~ the minds of mankind my mind become exceedingly distressed for I became convicted of my Sins and by searching the

mankind

Scriptures I found that ~~man~~ ^{mankind} did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatised from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament and I felt to mourn for my own Sins and for the Sins of the world for I learned in the Scriptures that God was the same yesterday to day and forever that he was no respecter to persons for he was God for I looked upon the sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their magesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in magesty and in the strength of beauty whose power and intilgence in governing the things which are so exceding great and marvilous even in the likeness of him

who created ^{them} ~~him~~ and when I considered upon these things
 my heart exclaimed well hath the wise man said ^{it is a} ~~the~~ fool
 that
 saith in his heart there is no God my heart exclaimed all
 all these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and
 omnipreasant power a being who makith Laws and de-
 creeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth
 Eternity who was and is and will be from all Eternity to
 Eternity and when I considered all these things and that ^{that}
 being seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit
 and in truth therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy for
 there was none else to whom I could go and ~~to~~ obtain
 mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and
 while in ^{the} attitude of calling upon the Lord ^{in the 16th year of my age} a pillar of fire-
 light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down
 from above and rested upon me and I was filld with the
 spirit of God and the ^{Lord} opened the heavens upon me and I
 saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph ^{my son} thy
 Sins are forgiven thee. go thy ^{way} walk in my statutes and keep
 my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was
 crucified for the world that all those who believe on my
 name may have Eternal life ^{behold} the world lieth in sin ~~and~~ at
 this time and none doeth good no not one they have turned
 asside from the Gospel and keep not ^{my} commandments they
 draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far
 from me and mine anger is kindling against the inhabi-
 tants of the earth to visit them acording to this ungodliness
 and to bring to pass that which ^{hath} been spoken by the mouth
 of the prophets and Apostles behold and lo I come quickly
 as it written of me in the cloud ^{clothed} in the glory of my Father
 and my soul was filled with love and for many days I
 could rejoyce with great joy and the Lord was with me but
 could find none that would believe the heavenly vision. . . .

In October 1834 Oliver Cowdery, the editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*, introduced the first published history of the Church. This work was presented in the form of correspondence between Cowdery and William W. Phelps, and was anticipated as a "full history of the rise of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, and the most interesting parts of its progress, to the present time." It was further announced by the

3
 marvelous even in the likeness of him who created ~~him~~^{them}
 and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaim-
 ed well hath the wise man said ~~the~~^{it is as if} ~~for~~^{that} south in
 his heart there is no God my heart exclaimed all all
 these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent
 and omnipotent power a being who maketh laws and
 decreeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who
 filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all
 Eternity ~~to~~^{to} Eternity and when I considered all these things
 and that ~~that~~^{that} being seeketh such to worship him as wor-
 ship him in spirit and in truth therefore I cried unto
 the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and
 to obtain mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness
 and while in ~~the~~^{the} attitude of calling upon the Lord, a pillar of
 fire light above the brightness of the sun at noon day
 come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled
 with the spirit of God and ~~the~~^{the} ~~opened~~^{opened} the heavens upon
 me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying
 Joseph ~~thy~~^{my} sins are forgiven thee go thy ~~way~~^{way} in my
 statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the
 Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all them
 who believe on my name may have eternal life ~~the~~^{the} world
 birth in sin ~~and~~^{and} at this time and none doeth good no
 not one they have turned aside from the Gospel and
 keep not ~~my~~^{my} commandments they draw near to me with their
 lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger
 is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit
 them according to their ungodliness and to bring to pass
 that which ~~has~~^{has} been spoken by the mouth of the proph-
 ets and of ~~the~~^{the} ~~behold~~^{behold} and lo I come quickly as it was
 written of me in the cloud ~~in~~ⁱⁿ the glory of my Father
 and my soul was filled with love and for many days I
 could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me
 but could find none that would believe the heavenly
 vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart
 about ~~the~~^{the} ~~time~~^{time} ~~very~~^{very} ~~much~~^{much} and about after many

Page three of the 1831-32 account of Joseph Smith's First Vision as recorded by Frederick G. Williams. By courtesy of the Church Historian.

No. 11

A License, Liberty Power and authority, Given to Eben Green,
 signing and publishing, that he has been baptised and succeeded into
 the Church of Christ by baptism and established on the sixth day of April
 in the year of our Lord on, show and eight hundred and thirty seven
 to the commandment of the Lord, and agreed to the Law of the Lord
 This proves therefore that he has been ordained a Priest under the
 hand of Liberty Higdon, according to the articles & covenant of the
 Church on the 14th day of January A. D. 1833 in the Town of Tipton
 Gaage Co Ohio

Wm. Williams Secy of Con.

A License written by Frederick G. Williams on January 14, 1833. By courtesy of the Church Historian.

editor that "our brother J. Smith Jr. has offered to assist us. Indeed, there are many items connected with the fore part of this subject that render his labor indispensable. With his labor and with authentic documents now in our possession, we hope to render this a pleasing and agreeable narrative."¹⁴ In a series of eight letters that followed, Cowdery presented random historical events, beginning in the October 1834 issue of the paper with an account of the priesthood restoration, and terminating in the October 1835 issue with the visit of Moroni to Joseph Smith.

A copy of the eight letters was transcribed into the Prophet's journal in 1835. On October 29 Joseph recorded that he went with his newly appointed scribe, Warren Parrish, to obtain his "large journal" from Frederick G. Williams. Later that same day Parrish began writing "a history" of Joseph's life by concluding "President Cowdery's second letter to W. W. Phelps, which President Williams had begun."¹⁵ A check of the handwriting in the journal reveals the point at which Parrish commenced copying the second Cowdery letter to Phelps. It also shows that Parrish continued writing to the end of the eighth letter. At this point, however, unlike the published account, the journal narrative does not end, but continues in a different style. The transition is marked by a change in handwriting from Warren Parrish to that of Warren A. Cowdery and is prefaced with the following introduction: "Here the reader will observe that the narrative assumes a different form. The subject of it becoming daily more and more noted, the writer deemed it proper to give a plain, simple and faithful narrative of every important item in his every day occurrences. . . ."¹⁶ Then follows 142 pages of daily, journal-type entries written in the third person singular, commencing with September 22, 1835, and continuing to January 18, 1836. In this journal, under the date of November 9, 1835, an interview with a Jewish minister is recorded in which Joseph Smith again relates the account of his First Vision:¹⁷

¹⁴*Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio), October 1834, p. 13.

¹⁵Smith, "History," B-1, p. 631. See also *DHC*, Vol. 2, p. 293.

¹⁶Smith, "History," A-1, p. 105 (numbering from the back of the book).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 120-122. Quoted with the punctuation and spelling of the original.

Monday Nov. 9th. . . . While sitting in his house this morning between the hours of ten and eleven a man came in and introduced himself to him calling himself Joshua the Jewish Minister. His appearance was something singular, having a beard about three inches in length which is quite grey, his hair was also long and considerably silvered with age. He had the appearance of a man about 50 or 55 years old. He was tall and straight, slender frame, blue eyes, thin visage, and fair complexion. He wore a green frock coat and pantaloons of the same color. He had on a black fur hat with a narrow brim. When speaking he frequently shuts his eyes and exhibits a kind of scowl upon his countenance. He (Joseph) made some inquiry after his name, but received no definite answer. The conversation soon turned upon the subject of Religion, and after the subject of this narrative had made some remarks concerning the bible, he commenced giving him a relation of the circumstances, connected with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, which were nearly as follows. Being wrought up in my mind respecting the subject of Religion, and looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong, but considered it of the first importance to me that I should be right, in matters of so much moment, matter involving eternal consequences. Being thus perplexed in mind I retired to the silent grove and there bowed down before the Lord, under a realizing sense (if the bible be true) ask and you shall receive, knock and it shall be opened, seek and you shall find, and again, if any man lack wisdom, let of God who giveth to all men liberally & upbraideth not. Information was what I most desired at this time, and with a fixed determination to obtain it, I called on the Lord for the first time in the place above stated, or in other words, I made a fruitless attempt to pray My tongue seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some one walking towards me. I strove again to pray, but could not; the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprang upon my feet and looked round, but saw no person, or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking. I kneeled again, my mouth was opened and my tongue loosed; I called on the Lord in mighty prayer. A pillar of fire appeared above my head; which presently rested down upon me, and filled me with unspeakable joy. A personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame, which was spread all around and yet nothing consumed. Another personage soon appeared like unto the first: he said unto me thy sins are forgiven thee. He testified also unto me that Jesus Christ is the son of God. I saw many angels in this vision. I was about 14 years old when I received this first communication. . . .

November 1835

at this time, and with a fixed determination to obtain it, I called on the Lord for the first time in the place above stated, or in other words, I made a fruitless attempt to pray. My tongue seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some one walking towards me, I strove again to pray, but could not; the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer; I sprang upon my feet and looked round, but saw no person, or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking. I knelt again, my mouth was opened and my tongue loosed, I called on the Lord in mighty prayer. A pillar of fire appeared above my head, which presently rained down upon me, and filled me with unspeakable joy. A personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame, which was spread all around and yet nothing consumed. Another personage soon appeared, like unto the first; he said unto me thy sins are forgiven thee. He testified also unto me that Jesus Christ is the son of God. I saw many angels in this vision. I was about 14 years old when I received this first communication. When I was about 17 years I had another vision of angels; in the night season, after I had retired to bed; I had not been asleep, but was meditating upon my past life and experiences. I was well aware I had not kept the commandments, and I repented heartily for all my sins and transgressions, and humbled myself before him, whose eye surveys all things at a glance, all at once.

That said party of the second part is to continue to send said Lyman H. Cowdery to such a school as in it he may obtain, in the five years aforesaid, a full and complete knowledge of the whole of sciences embraced in a collegiate or classical education.

In witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands and seals — — —

In presence of
H. Parrish

W. A. Cowdery

Lyman H. Cowdery
Joseph Smith Jr

A page of the 1835 account of Joseph Smith's First Vision as recorded by Warren A. Cowdery. The bottom section is part of an indenture written by him on November 3, 1836. A distinctive feature of Cowdery's handwriting is the sweeping flourish of his terminal "d"s. By courtesy of the Church Historian.

On November 14, 1835, five days after the foregoing narrative, Warren A. Cowdery also recorded the visit of Erastus Holmes of Newbury, Ohio, who inquired of Joseph Smith about the establishment of the Church and was given "a brief relation of his experience while in his youthful days, say from the age of six years up to the time he received the first visitation of Angels which was when he was about 14 years old. He also gave him an account of the revelations he afterward received concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. . . ." ¹⁸

The writing of the manuscript of Joseph Smith's *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, as edited by B. H. Roberts and published in 1902, was begun on June 11, 1839, when Joseph commenced dictating to his clerk James Mulholland. The Prophet's journal containing the 1835 history was turned over and utilized as Book A-1 of the ensuing multivolume work. Evidence in the opening pages of the "History" shows that Mulholland began writing from a record that had been written the previous year. This is obvious from the references in the "History" on page one to the "eighth year since the organization of said Church," ¹⁹ and page eight to "this day, being the Second day of May, One thousand Eight hundred and thirty eight." ²⁰ Furthermore, on April 27, 1838, Joseph records spending the day "writing a history of this church from the earliest period of its existence up to this date;" ²¹ and on May 1-4 he records that "the First Presidency were engaged in writing church History." ²² This last reference compared with the statement on page eight of the history confirms that this was the narrative being written on May 2, 1838.

That the beginning pages of the present manuscript Volume A-1 were incorporated into Joseph Smith's "History" by James Mulholland in 1839 from the account written the previous year, is plain from the following facts: First, the initial 59 pages of the book are in the handwriting of Mulholland, who did not begin writing for Joseph Smith until September 3, 1838. He discontinued writing during the Mis-

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁹Compare *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 2.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

²¹Smith, "History," B-1, p. 791. See also *DHC*, Vol. 3, p. 25.

²²*Ibid.*, B-1, p. 794. *DHC*, Vol. 3, p. 26.

souri incarceration of the Prophet and did not recommence until April 22, 1839.²³ Second, on Tuesday, June 11, 1839, Joseph records: "I commenced dictating my history for my Clerk—James Mulholland to write."²⁴ Third, Mulholland substantiates Joseph Smith's June 11 entry in his own journal with a note on that day stating that he was "writing &c for Church history."²⁵

The following is the well-known account of the First Vision as it is recorded in this "History" by Mulholland in 1839. That he died on November 3, 1939, precludes his having written the account after that date:²⁶

Owing to the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil disposed and designing persons in relation to the rise and progress of the Church of ^{Jesus Christ of} Latter day Saints, all of which have been designed by the authors thereof to militate against its character as a Church, and its progress in the world I have been induced to write this history so as to disabuse the publick mind, and put all enquirers after truth into possession of the facts as they have transpired in relation both to myself and the Church as far as I have such facts in possession.

In this history I will present the various events in relation to this Church in truth and righteousness as they have transpired, or as they at present exist, being now the eighth year since the organisation of said Church. I was born in the year of our Lord One thousand Eight hundred and five, on the twenty third day of December, in the town of Sharon,

Note A 131

Windsor County, State of Vermont. [^]My father Joseph See Note E page 2. adenda. My Father Smith Senior [^]left the State of Vermont and moved to Palmyra, Ontario, (now Wayne) County, in the State of New thereabout.

York when I was in my tenth year. or [^]

In about four years after my father's arrival at Palmyra, he moved with his family into Manchester in the same County of Ontario. His family consisting of eleven souls, namely, My Father Joseph Smith, My Mother Lucy Smith whose name previous to her marriage was Mack, daughter of Solomon Mack, my brothers Alvin (who *is now dead*)

²³James Mulholland, "Journal" (MS, LDS Historian's Library), under dates indicated.

²⁴See footnote 1.

²⁵Mulholland, "Journal," June 11, 1839. On several occasions beginning on June 11, he records writing the history of the Church.

²⁶Smith, "History," A-1, pp. 1-4. Punctuation and spelling of the original.

Hyrum, Myself, Samuel-Harrison, William, Don Carloss, and my Sisters Sophonia, Cathrine and Lucy. Sometime in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country, indeed the whole district of Country seemed affected by it and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division among the people, Some crying, "Lo here" and some Lo there. Some were contending for the Methodist faith, Some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist, for notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great Zeal manifested by the respective Clergy who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased. Yet when the Converts began to file off some to one party and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the Priests and the Converts were ~~more~~ ~~pretended~~ more pretended than real, for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued, Priest contending against priest, and convert against convert so that all their good feelings one for another (if they ever had any) were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions.

I was at this time in my fifteenth year. My Fathers
ere

family was proselyted to the Presbyterian faith and four of them joined that Church, Namely, My Mother Lucy, My Brothers Hyrum, Samuel Harrison, and my sister Sophonia.

During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness, but though my feelings were deep and often pungent, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties though I attended

as often
their several meetings^as occasion would permit. But in process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them, but so great was the confusion and strife amongst the different denominations that it was impossible for a person young as I was and so unacquainted with men and things to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. My mind at different times was greatly excited ~~for~~ the cry and tumult were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists and used all their powers of either reason or sophistry to prove their errors, or at least to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand the Baptists and

the Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others.

In the midst of this war of words, and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself, what is to be done? Who of all these parties are right? Or are they all wrong together? And if any one of them be right which is it? And how shall I know it? While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, First Chapter and fifth verse which reads, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man that this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did, for how to act I did not know and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, would never know, for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passage of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible. At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion or else I must do as James directs, that is, Ask of God. I at last came to the determination to ask of God, concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally and not upbraid, I might venture. So in accordance with this my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day early in the spring of Eighteen hundred and twenty. It

was the first time in my life that I had^{made} such an attempt, for amidst all^{my} anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally.

After I had retired into the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me and finding myself alone, I knelt down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God, I had scarcely done so, when immediately

I was^{siezed} upon by some power which entirely overcame me^{had} and such astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had siezed upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction, not to an imaginary ruin but to the power of some actual being from

the unseen world who had such a marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being. Just at this moment of great

of
alarm I saw a pillar^light exactly over my head above the brightness of the sun, which descended ~~gracefully~~ gradually untill it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description) standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me calling me by name and said (pointing to the other) "This is my beloved Son, Hear him." My object in going to enquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner therefore did I get possession of myself so as to be able to speak, than I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right, (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong) and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their Creeds were an abomination in his sight, that those professors were all corrupt, that they draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof." He again forbade me to join with any of them and many other things did he say unto me which I cannot write at this time. When I came to

my
myself again I found myself lying on^back looking up

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into Heaven. ^Some few days after I had this vision I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist Preachers who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement and conversing with him on the subject of religion I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior, he treated my communication not only lightly but with great contempt, saying it was all of the Devil, that there was no such thing as visions of revelations in these days, that all such things had ceased with the Apostles and that there never would be any more of them. I soon found however that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion and was the cause of great persecution which continued to increase and though I was an obscure boy

or thereabouts
only between fourteen and fifteen years of age^and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, Yet men of high standing would take notice sufficiently to excite the public mind against me and create

a hot persecution, and this was common^{among} all the sects: all united to persecute me. It has often caused me serious reflection both then and since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy of a little over fourteen years of age and one too who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintainance by his daily labor should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day so as to create in them a spirit of the bitterest persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and was often cause of great sorrow to myself. However it was nevertheless a fact, that I had had a Vision. I have thought since that I felt much like Paul ~~did~~ when he made his defence before King Agrippa and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light and heard a voice, but still there were but few who beleived him, some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad, and he was ridiculed and reviled, But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision he

^{all} knew he had, and the persecution under Heaven could not make it otherwise, and though they should persecute him unto death yet he knew and would know to his latest breath that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. So it was with me, I had actualy seen a light and in the midst of that light I saw two personages,

and they did in reality speak^{un} to me, or one of them did, And though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true and while they were persecuting me reviling me and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart,

^{me} why persecute for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision, "and who am I that I can withstand God" or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen, for I had seen a vision, I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dare I do it, at

^I least I knew that by so doing would offend God and come under condemnation. I had now got my mind satisfied so far as the Sectarian world was concerned, that it was not my duty to join with any of them, but continue as I was untill further directed, ~~for~~ I had found the testimony of James to be true, that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain and not be upbraided. . . .²⁷

²⁷Three notes are inserted into the text of this account containing information added by Joseph Smith subsequent to the beginning of this "History." The first of these, designated "Note A," contains an account of the removal of the

Acher C. Kimball John Taylor Hyrum Clarke
 Brigham Young Wilford Woodruff John Scott
 William Smith George A. Smith John Snider
 John C. Page Theodore Turley Samuel Mullian.

And I feel great pleasure in being able to state that I know them
 to be men of truth and virtue: That I know them to be men called
 of the Lord and sent forth by him to preach "this gospel of the Kingdom in
 all the world as a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

I therefore exhort my Friends and relatives to hear them.

"To ~~the~~ ^{approve} all things, and hold fast that which is good."

Not to condemn nor reject these men unheard; but to try them by the
 criterion which the saviour has given: "A good tree bringeth forth good
 fruit." And also by John's criterion. "He that abideth in the doctrines
 of Christ, hath both the Father and the Son." And for my own part I
 thank the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that He has given
 me grace to hear, believe, and know for myself, that the doctrines
 which these men preach, and the ordinances they observe are of God,
 and given unto men by the revelation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus
 Christ in these last days. — James Mulholland

James Mulholland's handwriting and signature on July 10, 1839. By courtesy of the Church Historian.

passage of Scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the questions by an appeal to
 the Bible. At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion
 or else I must do as James directs, that is, Ask of God. I at last came to the determination to
 ask of God, concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give
 liberally and not upbraid, I might venture. So, in accordance with this my determination to ask
 of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day
 early in the spring of Eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had
 made such an attempt, for amidst all ^{my} anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray secretly.
 After I had retired into the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked
 around me and finding myself alone, I knelt down and began to offer up the desires of my
 heart to God, I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was ^{seized} upon by some power which
 entirely overcame me and ^{had} such astonishing influence over me, as to bind my tongue
 that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me and it seemed to me
 as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But exerting all my powers to call upon the
 liber me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment
 when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction, I saw
 a ruin but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world who had
 marvellous power as I had never before felt in any being. Just at this moment
 I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head above the high top of the sun, which
 gradually gradually untill it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I felt myself
 delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw
 two personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description) standing above me, one
 of whom spake unto me calling me by name and said, in a low voice, "I am
 thy Father, and I have said, 'I will give thee mine own law, that thou shalt be
 beloved Son, Hear him'." My object in going into the woods was to determine
 which of all the sects was right, to which I might adhere. I did not know
 did I get possession of my self so as to be able to speak, I asked the persons who
 stood above me in the light, which of the sects was right, (for at this time it had never
 entered into my heart that all were wrong, and which I should join. I was assured that
 I must join none of them, for they were all wrong. A personage who stood before me
 that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those who were
 corrupt, that they draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me,
 teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness but
 the power thereof." He again forbade me to join with them and said, "I
 did he say unto me which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself I
 found myself lying on my back looking up into Heaven. It was me few days after
 vision I happened to be in company with one of the Methodists, who had been
 active in the aforementioned religious excitement and conversation. In the course
 of religion I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had seen.
 I was greatly surprised at his behaviour, he treated my communication
 lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the Devil, that he had never
 thing as visions or revelations in his days, that at such a time as this

Page three of the 1838 account of Joseph Smith's First Vision as recorded by James Mulholland in the "History of the Church" in 1839. By courtesy of the Church Historian. (The outer edges are still legible on the original, but will not photograph dark enough to show up in reproduction. Ed.)

In summary, a study of the writing of Joseph Smith's history indicates that while the official account of his First Vision was not compiled until relatively late in his life, the apparent time-lag between the vision and the recording of the event is more presumed than real. Considering the youth of the Prophet, the frontier conditions in which he lived, his lack of academic training, the absence of any formal directive to motivate him to write, and the antagonistic reception he received upon first relating the experience, it is not strange that he failed to preserve an account of his First Vision during the decade between 1820 and 1830. However, once directed by an 1830 revelation to keep a history, Joseph acted with all the dispatch that time-consuming responsibilities and frustrating difficulties would allow. This seems particularly evident when these factors are viewed within the framework of the surviving fragmentary beginnings of the history, and the mass of historical data preserved by the Prophet during the final fourteen years of his life. On three known occasions, prior to 1839 when Joseph Smith undertook the official chronicle of the events of his life, he presented his First Vision narrative as an integral part of the effort to keep a history.

Smith family from Vermont to New York prior to the beginning of Joseph's public ministry, which may explain why it was not included in the printed "History." "Note B" reads as follows, and is contained in our present printed text: "When the light had departed I had no strength, but soon recovering in some degree. I went home, & as I leaned up to the fire piece Mother enquired what the matter was. I replied never mind all is well.—I am well enough off. I then told my Mother I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not True.—It seems as though the adversary was aware at a very early period of my life that I was destined to prove a disturbance & annoyer of his Kingdom, or else why should the powers of Darkness combine against me, why the oppression & persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?" "History," A-1, pp. 132-133. "Note C," which appears later in the text, contains Joseph's qualification of his statement that he had been led into "divers temptations," wherein he asserts that "in making this confession no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins. . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 133. Since none of these insertions appear in the first published account of this "History" in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842, but the last two are included in the present printed text, critics have regarded this as an example of text tampering. It is doubtful from the content of the notes that they could have originated from anyone other than Joseph Smith. More important, however, is the fact that all three of them appear in Book A-1 in Willard Richards' handwriting. Since his tenure as scribe on the "History" did not begin until December 1841 and was concluded in March 1844, it is plain that these three insertions were included during Joseph's supervision of the "History."

THE WENTWORTH LETTER

Joseph Smith's letter to Mr. John Wentworth was published in the March 1, 1842 issue of the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo, Illinois. Although the whole letter runs about three full pages, the rendition of the First Vision events is only one-half page long. The Prophet himself called it a "sketch," a "brief history." The conclusion of the letter is Joseph Smith's statement of belief which has come to be known as The Articles of Faith. Ed.

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called on the Lord devoutly because we had already come into the land of this idolatrous nation.

CHURCH HISTORY.

At the request of Mr. John Wentworth, Editor, and Proprietor of the "Chicago Democrat," I have written the following sketch of the rise, progress, persecution, and faith of the Latter-Day Saints, of which I have the honor, under God, of being the founder. Mr. Wentworth says, that he wishes to furnish Mr. Bastow, a friend of his, who is writing the history of New Hampshire, with this document. As Mr. Bastow has taken the proper steps to obtain correct information all that I shall ask at his hands, is, that he publish the account entire, ungarnished, and without misrepresentation.

I was born in the town of Sharon Windsor co., Vermont, on the 23d of December, A. D. 1805. When ten years old my parents removed to Palmyra New York, where we resided about four years, and from thence we removed to the town of Manchester.

My father was a farmer and taught me the art of husbandry. When about fourteen years of age I began to reflect upon the importance of being prepared for a future state, and upon enquiring the plan of salvation I found that there was a great clash in religious sentiment; if I went to one society they referred me to one plan, and another to another; each one pointing to his own particular creed as the summum bonum of perfection: considering that all could not be right, and that God could not be the author of so much confusion I determined to investigate the subject more fully, believing that if God had a church it would not be split up into factions, and that if he taught one society to worship one way, and administer in one set of ordinances, he would not teach another principles which were diametrically opposed. Believing the word of God I had confidence in the declaration of James; "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not and it shall be given him," I retired to a secret place in a grove and began to call upon the Lord, while fervently engaged in supplication my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a

heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day. They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom. And I was expressly commanded to "go not after them," at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.

On the evening of the 21st of ber, A. D. 1823, while I unto God, and endeavor faith in the precious pr on a sudden a light of a far purer and ance, and brig indeed the f house w hat Christ will reign n the earth, and that the renewed and receive its par- ory.

claim the privilege of worshipping ighty God according to the dictates our conscience, and allow all men the same privilege let them worship how, where, or what they may.

We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law.

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to *all men*; indeed we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul "we believe all things we hope all things," we have endured many things and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is any thing virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praise worthy we seek after these things. Respectfully &c.,

JOSEPH SMITH.

TIMES AND SEASONS.

CITY OF NAUVOO,

TUESDAY, MARCH, 15, 1842.

TO SUBSCRIBERS.

☞ This paper commences my editorial career, I alone stand responsible for it, and shall do for all papers having my signature henceforward. I am not responsible for the publication, or arrangement of the former paper; the matter did not come under my supervision.

JOSEPH SMITH.

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A STAINED-GLASS REPLICA
OF
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FIRST VISION

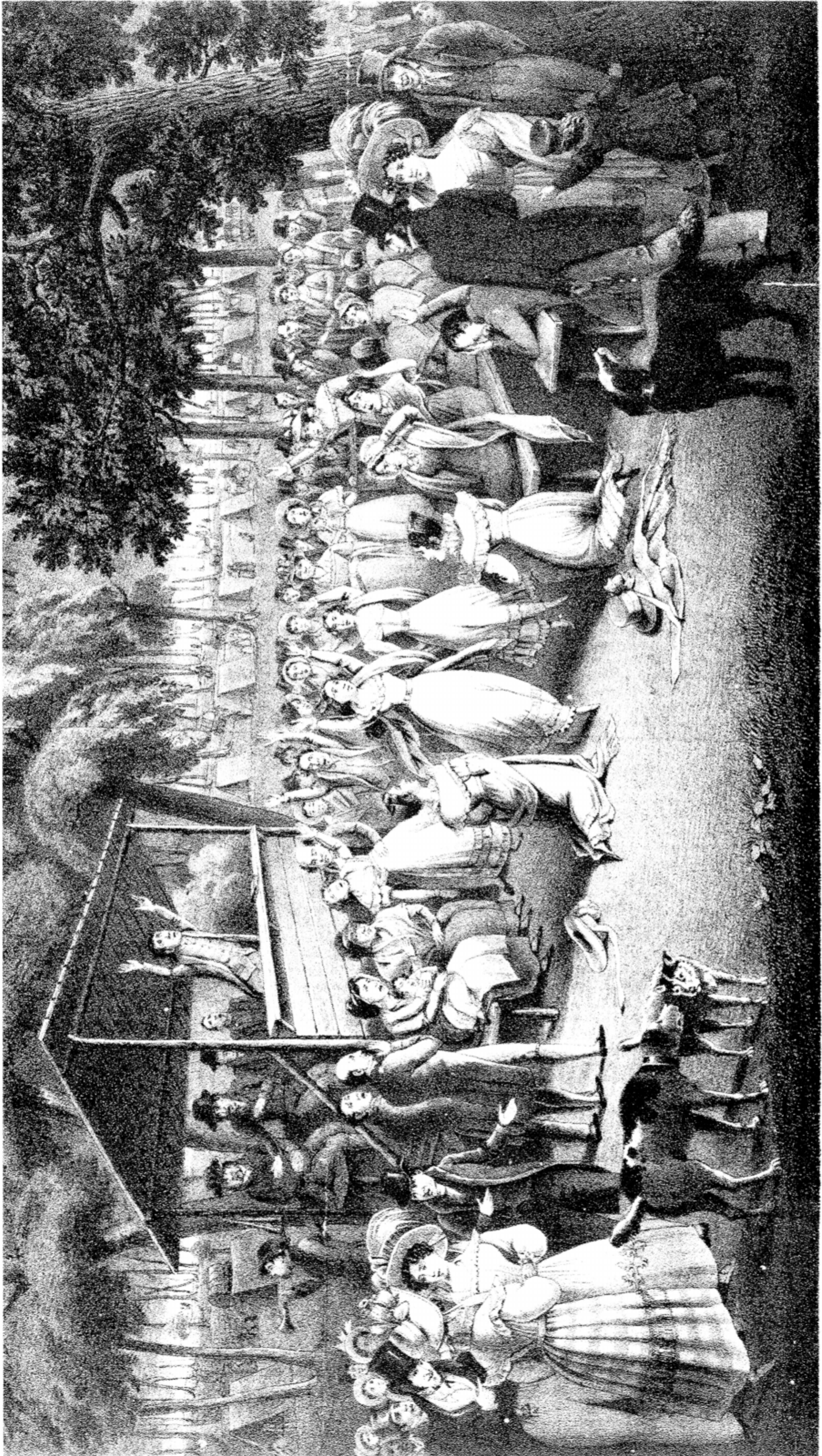
Transparency by J. M. Heslop

*If any of you lack
wisdom, let him ask of God,
that giveth to all men
liberally, and upbraideth not;
and it shall be
given him.*

JAMES 1:5



IF ANY OF YOU CRUISE, COME LET HIM ASK OF GOD...
THAT GIVETH TO MEN LIBERALLY AND REBUKETH NOT
AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN HIM
JAMES 1-5 V.
- THIS IS MY BELOVED SON - HEAR HIM -



Drawn on Stone by H. Stuber

Engraved by James L. G. G. G.

CAMP-MEETING

J. B. G. G. G.

Awakenings in the Burned-over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision

Milton V. Backman, Jr.*

The six decades preceding the Civil War were years of intense religious activity in many sections of the United States. During this second great awakening, sporadic spiritual quickenings erupted throughout the new nation; and many Americans living in the rugged frontier communities, in the rapidly growing urban areas, and in the villages and towns of northern and southern United States turned their attention to organized religion. Subsequently, church membership and religious zeal soared. Although in 1800 there were fewer church members in this country than in any other Christian land and active church membership had dropped to about seven percent of the population, the lowest in the history of this land, this decline was arrested; and in 1850, 17 percent of the Americans were churched. By 1860, membership in religious societies increased to about 23 percent of the rapidly expanding American population.¹

One of the regions in the new nation that was in an almost constant state of revivalism was western New York. During the first half of the nineteenth century, revivals were so habitual and powerful in the area west of the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains that historians have labeled this ecclesiastical storm center the "Burned-over District."²

As in Kentucky, the winter of 1799-1800 was the era of a "Great Revival" in western New York. Since an innumerable

*Dr. Backman is associate professor of history and religion at Brigham Young University. His *American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism* (1965) is a landmark in the field.

¹Milton V. Backman, Jr., *American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, 1965), pp. 283, 308-309.

²Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District* (Ithaca, 1950), pp. 3-4.

series of spiritual quickenings followed this first major wave of enthusiasm, this powerful awakening initiated a new religious epoch in that region of America. Although one can locate evidence of spiritual enlivenment in a number of New York communities every year of the early 1800's, peak periods occurred when revivals erupted in more than the customary number of towns and villages and unprecedented numbers joined the popular churches of that age. One of these apexes of religious fervor followed the low ebb which occurred during the War of 1812. Between 1816 and 1821, revivals were reported in more towns and a greater number of settlers joined churches than in any previous period of New York history.³ After a brief calm in which awakenings continued in a less spectacular manner, the grand climax in the "series of crests in religious zeal" occurred between 1825 and 1837.⁴

JOSEPH SMITH IN THE BURNED-OVER DISTRICT

One who was spiritually quickened while living in the Burned-over District was Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet. Joseph became keenly interested in organized religion during one of the higher waves of revivalism which swept across western New York. Approximately eighteen years after witnessing this spiritual phenomenon, Joseph recalled his experi-

³*Ibid.*, pp. 9-11; P. H. Fowler, *Historical Sketch of Presbyterianism Within the Bounds of the Synod of Central New York* (Utica, 1877), pp. 167-68. Presbyterian church membership in western New York (based on the membership reports of the Geneva, Cayuga, Oneida, Onandoga, Ontario, Niagara, Rochester, Genesee, and Bath presbyteries) increased slowly from 1812 to 1816, the average annual increase being about five hundred members per year. In 1816, Presbyterian membership in western New York increased 1,050; in 1817, the increase was 1,989; in 1818, 1,516; and in 1819, the reported increase was 1,513. Since the report for 1819 did not include the membership of the Genesee presbytery, the increase in 1819 was probably greater than any previous year except for 1817. Methodist increase in membership in approximately the same region (based on membership reports of the Chenango, Oneida, and Genesee districts and the districts formed from these bodies) indicates that there was an increase in membership in 1816 of 1,873; of 1,613 in 1817; and of 2,154 in 1818. After a major realignment occurred in the districts in 1819, membership reports reveal that during the year 1820 another significant increase in membership took place, there being an increase of 2,256. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from its Organization A.D. 1789 to A.D. 1820 inclusive* (Philadelphia, n.d.), pp. 516, 574-75, 634-35, 667, 696, 742; *Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1816), p. 34, hereafter referred to as *Methodist Minutes*; *Methodist Minutes* (1817), p. 29; *Methodist Minutes* (1818), p. 30; *Methodist Minutes* (1819), p. 36; *Methodist Minutes* (1820), p. 27; *Methodist Minutes* (1821), pp. 27-28.

⁴Cross, *Burned-over District*, p. 13.

ence from a distant vantage point. The Prophet asserted that in the second year after his removal to Manchester (a town, or sometimes called township in some states, which in the period immediately preceding the spring of 1820 had not been separated from the town of Farmington),⁵ an "unusual excitement on the subject of religion" occurred in "the place" where he lived. "It commenced," he said, "with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country." Then probably placing this religious quickening in an enlarged historical setting, Joseph declared, "Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties."⁶

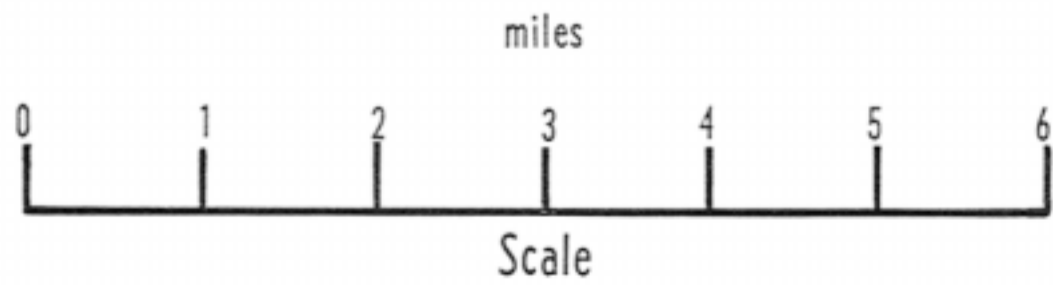
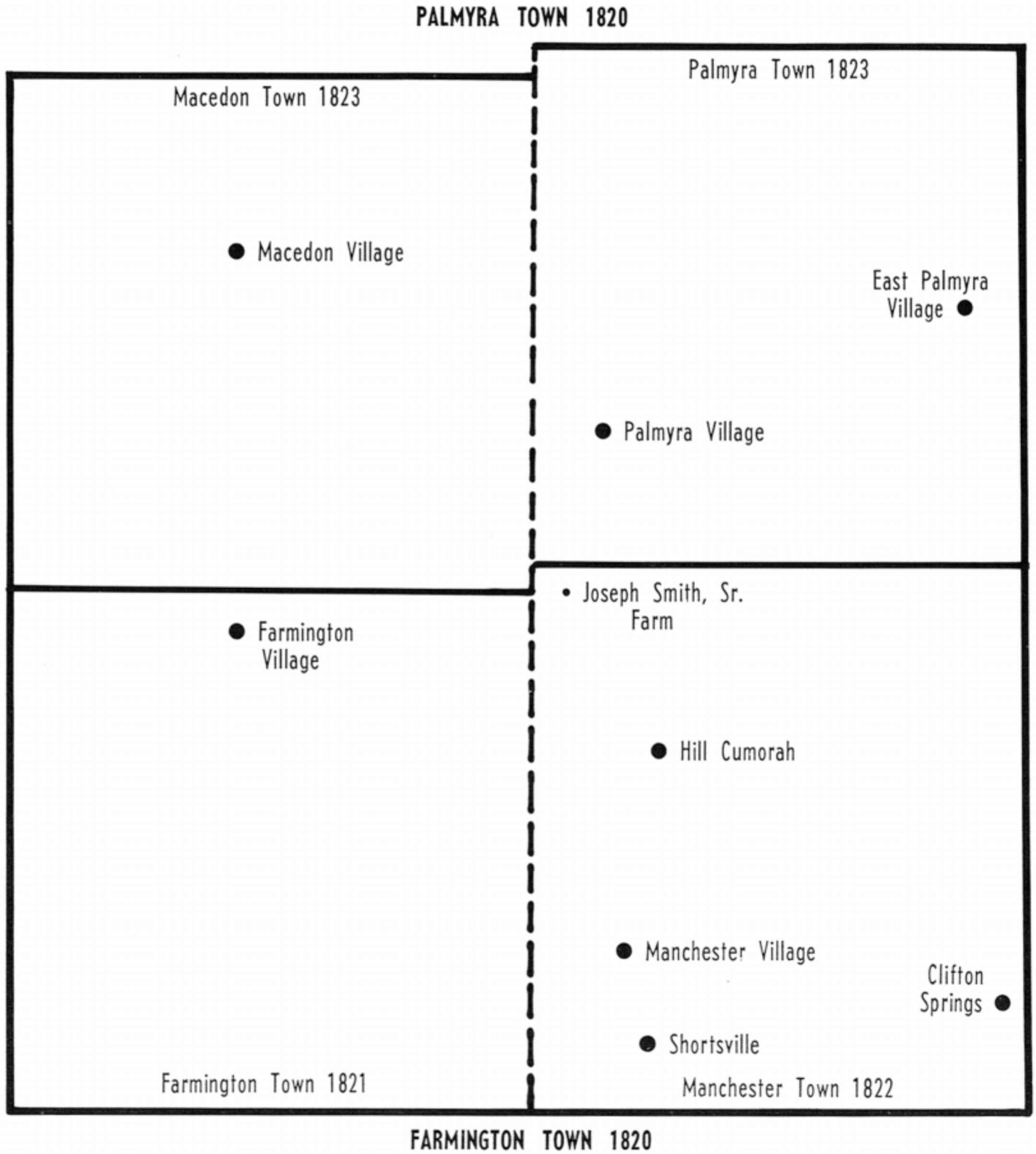
Although the tools of a historian cannot be employed either to verify or challenge Joseph's testimony concerning the remarkable vision which occurred during this awakening, records of the past can be examined to determine the reliability of Joseph's description regarding the historical setting of the First Vision.

Joseph Smith stated that the Methodists initiated the religious excitement which took place in the neighborhood where he lived during the months preceding the First Vision. At that time, Methodism was replacing the Baptist faith as the largest religious society in America, numerically speaking, and was the fastest growing religion in the early republic. These ambitious Protestants had initiated the most effective missionary program existent in the young nation. They, in part, solved the problem of the shortage of ministers by not requiring their preachers to be college graduates, and a great many dedicated Americans sacrificed many comforts of life to serve as Methodist itinerants. The Methodists, moreover, divided the country into conferences and districts and then subdivided the districts into stations and circuits. In areas where there was a Methodist meetinghouse, stationed preachers were appointed who in most instances derived much of their support from their own

⁵The town of Manchester was formed from Farmington on March 31, 1821. It was originally named "Burt," but the name was changed to Manchester on April 16, 1822. Horatio Gates Spafford, *A Gazetteer of the State of New York* (Albany, 1824), pp. 302-303; Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Ontario County, New York, for 1867-8* (Syracuse, 1867), p. 49.

⁶Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952), p. 46.

THE TOWNS OF PALMYRA AND FARMINGTON 1820



In 1821 Farmington Town was divided. One approximate six mile square area retained the name Farmington Town and the other section was called Burt Town and was renamed Manchester Town in 1822.

In 1823 Macedon Town was formed from the western section of Palmyra Town.

industry. But most communities, such as the towns of Palmyra and Farmington, were served by traveling ministers who had no secular employment. Preaching locations were determined within the circuits, and itinerant ministers were appointed to preach regularly in the designated places of worship. The circuits were called two-week circuits, three-week circuits, or four-week circuits depending on the period required to preach at each location. Ministers were usually assigned to a circuit for only one or at the most two years, and the presiding elders of each district were usually assigned to a region for no longer than four years. By this ingenious system, vast numbers of Americans living in rural communities received regular spiritual edification.⁷

PALMYRA METHODISTS UNTIL 1823

Since there were no Methodist meetinghouses in the towns of Palmyra and Farmington prior to 1823, Methodists residing in the neighborhood where Joseph lived worshipped in the homes of the settlers, in school buildings, and in and near the beautiful virgin groves.⁸ About every two weeks, a Methodist itinerant would contact the settlers in the towns of Palmyra and Farmington and would preach, exhort, and counsel those who gathered. The Smith farm was located near the border of the Ontario and Lyons Circuits (probably within the Ontario Circuit) of the Ontario District of the Genesee Conference, and from the summer of 1819 to the summer of 1820 these circuits were served by two active itinerants; William Snow and Andrew Peck visited the people residing in the Ontario Circuit, and Ralph Lanning and Isaac Grant traveled the Lyons Circuit.⁹ Since Joseph Smith considered joining the

⁷An excellent description of the Methodist circuit rider system is found in an article relating the history of Methodism in Connecticut. The program adopted in Connecticut was similar to the system existent in New York at the time of the First Vision. See William Thacher, "A Sketch of the History and Present State of Methodism in Connecticut," *The Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 5 (January, 1822), pp. 33-38.

⁸*Palmyra Courier*, August 17, 1866; *Palmyra: Wayne County* (Rochester, 1907), p. 51; G. A. Tuttle, "Historical Sketch of the Palmyra Methodist Episcopal Church," copy located in the Palmyra King's Daughters Free Library; Files of the Shortsville Enterprise Press, November 24, 1883; December 19, 1902, located in Shortsville, New York.

⁹*Methodist Minutes* (1819), p. 51. From July 1820, to July 1821, the Ontario Circuit was supplied by Thomas Wright and Elihu Nash. *Methodist Minutes* (1820), p. 44.

Methodist church, he probably listened to one or more of these ministers preach and was impressed by the message of salvation which they proclaimed.

One of the most effective missionary programs adopted by the Methodists to promulgate their faith was the camp meeting. Although Baptists, Presbyterians, and members of other religious societies also sponsored such meetings and while Christians of various faiths participated in these gatherings, the Methodists in western New York conducted more camp meetings in the early nineteenth century than did members of any other denomination. These meetings were usually held on the edge of a beautiful grove of trees or in a small clearing in the midst of a forest. After traveling many miles along dusty or water-logged roads, the settlers would locate their wagons and pitch their tents on the outskirts of the encampment. Farmers' markets and grog or liquor shops often sprung up near the camp grounds, thereby providing some farmers with unusual economic opportunities. The meetings frequently continued for several days, and sometimes one session would last nearly all day and into the night. Ministers would rotate preaching assignments so that one minister would immediately be followed by another, and at times two or three ministers would preach simultaneously in different parts of the camp ground. Ministers not only preached lengthy sermons but devoted much of their time in counseling and directing prayer circles and group singing.¹⁰

The numbers who attended camp meetings held in New York about 1820 varied considerably. There were times when only a few hundred gathered, and on other occasions thousands witnessed the proceedings.¹¹ In a camp meeting held in Palmyra in 1826 one reporter estimated that 10,000 people gathered on the grounds to behold the spiritual drama.¹²

¹⁰Charles Giles, *Pioneer: A Narrative of the Nativity, Experiences, Travels, and Ministerial Labours of Rev. Charles Giles* (New York, 1844), pp. 266-270; "Religious and Missionary Intelligence," *The Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 2 (December, 1819), pp. 474-476; Eben Smith, "Progress of the Work of God on Hudson-River District," *The Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 5 (December, 1822), pp. 474-475; *Palmyra Register*, June 28, 1820; July 5, 1820.

¹¹Theophilus Armenius, "Account of the Rise and Progress of the Work of God in the Western Country," *The Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 2 (July, 1819), p. 272; Thomas Madden, "Good Effects of Campmeetings," *The Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 1 (1818), pp. 152-153.

¹²"Genesee Conference," *The Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 7 (August, 1826), p. 313.

In some sections of early America, camp meetings frequently erupted into exciting spectacles in which enthusiasts demonstrated their emotional aspirations with a variety of physical demonstrations. During these exuberant meetings, people went into trances, jerked, rolled and crawled on the ground, barked like dogs, and fell to the ground as though they had been hit by a piercing cannon ball, remaining unconscious for minutes or even sometimes for hours. In western New York, however, at the time of the First Vision, physical demonstrations were rarely manifest, except for the occasional practice of falling to the ground and crying out for mercy. Nevertheless, some settlers who were attending these New York meetings for the first time were alarmed by the piercing, dissonant commotions that would occasionally erupt. Some viewed with mixed emotions the weeping, the crying, the mourning, and the sighing which created loud noises in the encampment.¹³

Camp meetings and other types of religious services were conducted regularly by Methodists in the community where Joseph Smith lived during the era of the First Vision, and many of these meetings undoubtedly could have been considered by an attender such as Joseph Smith as the beginning or the continuation of an unusual religious excitement. On June 19, 1818, for example, a camp meeting was held near Palmyra which, according to one report, resulted in twenty baptisms and forty conversions to the Methodist society.¹⁴ The following summer, many memorable Methodist services were held in Phelps, a town located near Manchester. These meetings precipitated a powerful spiritual awakening in that section of western New York.

The historic gatherings which led to a great revival and created such an impression on the settlers in the town of Phelps began in July 1819, when the Methodists of the Genesee Conference held their annual meetings in Phelps village which was then called Vienna. Approximately one hundred Methodist ministers gathered in this small village during that

¹³Giles, *Pioneer*, p. 268; R. Smith, *Recollections of Nettleton, and the Great Revival of 1820* (Albany, 1848), pp. 31-33, 71, 74, 123; T. Spicer, "A Short Sketch of the Revival of Religion in the City of Troy, A.D. 1816," *The Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 1 (1818), pp. 152-153.

¹⁴M. P. Blakeslee, "Notes for a History of Methodism in Phelps, 1886," p. 7, copy located in the Brigham Young University library.

summer to deliberate, to develop programs, to resolve controversies, and to receive edification, instruction, and annual appointments. The sessions of this conference were held in a yellow clapboard meetinghouse, a newly completed Methodist church which was painted with yellow ochre and crowned with a diminutive cupola. Although this building contained no classrooms, carpets, or cushions, fairly comfortable seats with backs were installed shortly before the conference began.¹⁵

In addition to the special services which were held in connection with this conference, camp meetings were conducted following the deliberations; and during the ensuing twelve months (from the summer of 1819 to the summer of 1820) a "flaming spiritual advance" occurred in that region. In the 1880's, one convert of that impressive revival, Mrs. Sarepta Marsh Baker, described this momentous awakening in a manner that resembled Joseph's testimony. The revival, she observed, was a "religious cyclone which swept over the whole region round about and the kingdom of darkness was terribly shaken."¹⁶

Since the boundaries of the Genesee Conference stretched from the Catskill Mountains in the east to Detroit in the west, a distance of about five hundred miles, and from Upper Canada in the north to central Pennsylvania in the south, a distance of about three hundred miles, many itinerant preachers—from western New York, northwestern Pennsylvania, portions of Canada, Ohio, and other western regions—traveled through or near Palmyra and Farmington in the summer of 1819. It was common for those ministers to preach and participate in camp meetings while they were traveling to and from their annual conferences. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to assume that Joseph Smith might have attended meetings convoked by ministers of this conference held immediately before, during, or shortly after the deliberations which took place in Phelps; and it might have been in connection with this event that Joseph Smith turned his attention to organized religion.

A contemporary of Joseph Smith, Orsamus Turner, concluded that the Mormon Prophet became excited about religion

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 6-7; "Journal of the Genesee Conference, 1810 to 1828," pp. 76-84, copy located in the Brigham Young University library; Helen Post Ridley, *When Phelps Was Young* (Phelps, 1939), p. 55; [W. H. McIntosh], *History of Ontario Co., New York* (Philadelphia, 1876), p. 170.

¹⁶Blakeslee, "History of Methodism in Phelps," pp. 7-8.

while he was attending a camp meeting held "away down in the woods, on the Vienna road," a road that led from Phelps village.¹⁷ This report of Joseph's catching a "spark of Methodist fire" while attending a camp meeting near Phelps, has been repeated by several town and county historians and interpreted as a meeting held in and near Phelps and in Oaks Corners, a small community located southeast of Phelps village in the town of Phelps.¹⁸

In the neighborhood where Joseph lived, camp meetings and other services conducted by Methodists were held so frequently at the time of the First Vision that notices of such gatherings seldom appeared in the local newspapers except when an unusual event occurred in connection with a particular meeting. In June 1820, the *Palmyra Register* reported on a Methodist camp meeting in the vicinity of Palmyra because an Irishman, James Couser, died the day after attending the gathering at which he became intoxicated. "It is supposed," the editor commented, that Couser "obtained his liquor, which was no doubt the cause of his death, at the Camp-ground, where it is a notorious fact, the intemperate, the lewd and dissolute part of community too frequently resort for no better object, than to gratify their base propensities."¹⁹ A quasi-apologetic clarification of this report was printed in a later edition of this paper in which the editor stated that when he wrote that Couser "obtained his liquor at the Camp-ground," he did not mean that the Irishman "obtained it within the enclosure of their [Methodist] place of worship, or that he procured it of them, but at the grog-shops which were established at, or *near* if you please, their camp-ground."²⁰

RECORDS REVEAL RELIGIOUS EXCITEMENT

Not only is historical evidence available to support Joseph Smith's testimony that an unusual excitement on the subject of religion commenced with the Methodists in the vicinity where he lived, but many records also reveal that the excitement "soon became general among all the sects in that region

¹⁷O. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, 1852), p. 214.

¹⁸Child, *Gazetteer*, p. 52; Mabel E. Oaks, *History of Oaks Corners Church and Community* (Phelps, 1954), p. 11.

¹⁹*Palmyra Register*, June 28, 1820.

²⁰*Ibid.*, July 5, 1820.

of country." There were three Presbyterian churches in the towns of Farmington and Palmyra in 1820: one located in or near the village of Farmington, one in East Palmyra, and another in Palmyra village. The Western Presbyterian Church was the only meetinghouse located in the village of Palmyra at the time of the First Vision and was the congregation with which Lucy, Samuel, Hyrum, and Sophronia were affiliated until shortly before The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized.²¹ There were also two Baptist meetinghouses in that area in 1820: one was located two miles west of Palmyra village (the Palmyra Baptist Church) and one near Manchester village (the Farmington Baptist Church). Members of the Society of Friends had erected three meetinghouses, one north of Palmyra village and two near the village of Farmington. The Methodists had one house of worship, a church which they purchased from the Episcopalians in the village of Clifton Springs, and Methodist classes were being held in or near Palmyra and Manchester villages at that time. In adjoining towns, other Protestant denominations such as the Freewill Baptists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Eastern Christians were worshipping.²²

An examination of Presbyterian church records reveals that between the summer of 1819 and the summer of 1820 its members participated in the upsurge of spiritual fervor which took place in the region of country where the Smith family lived. In the fall of 1819 a great awakening erupted in the village of Geneva, a community located near Phelps and adjacent to Seneca Lake. Whereas the average increase in membership of the Presbyterian Church in Geneva by examination (admission of new converts) had been only nine annually from 1812 to 1819, the increase in membership by examination from July 1819 to July 1820 was eighty. In September 1819 twenty-three adults were baptized, and in October 1819 approximate-

²¹"Records of the Session of the Presbyterian church in Palmyra," Vol. 2, pp. 11-12, located in the Western Presbyterian Church, Palmyra, New York; Pearl of Great Price, p. 47; [Sarah Lines], *One Hundred and Twenty-Five Years of the Western Presbyterian Church* (Palmyra, 1942), pp. 1-2; McIntosh, *History of Ontario County*, p. 195.

²²*Minutes of the Fifty-Eighth Anniversary of the Ontario Baptist Association* (Canandaigua, 1871), pp. 13-16; *Wayne County Journal*, June 6, 1872; Fred G. Reynolds, *One Hundred Years' History of the First Baptist Church of Macedon*, N. Y. (Macedon, n. d.), pp. 4-5; McIntosh, *History of Ontario County*, pp. 111-113, 176, 180-182, 194, 221, 264; Marilla Marks ed., *Memoirs of the Life of David Marks* (Dover, N.H., 1846), p. 26.

ly fifty new members (who had not previously been Presbyterians) were received into this church.²³

An examination of the session records of the Presbyterian Church located at Oaks Corners provides further evidence that an unusual awakening was occurring in the region where Joseph lived during the months immediately preceding the First Vision. The average annual increase in membership of this church between 1806 and 1819 had been only five, with no more than nine new members being admitted by profession in any single year prior to 1820. In 1820, however, seven were admitted by profession in January, fifteen in April, six in August, and two in November, making a total of thirty additions to this small congregation.²⁴

Revivals among Presbyterians not only erupted in the village of Geneva and the town of Phelps in 1819 and 1820, but during these years awakenings occurred in Penfield, Rochester, Lima, West Bloomfield and Junius, towns or villages located within a radius of twenty-five miles of the Smith farm. Within a radius of forty-five miles of Joseph's log cabin home, other significant "ingatherings" of Presbyterians occurred in Cayuga, Auburn, Aurora, Trumansburg (Ulysses), Ogden, East and West Riga, Bergen, and Le Roy; and prospects of revivals were reported in Waterloo and Canandaigua, meaning that in these areas there was probably an unusual religious excitement.²⁵

Although membership records of the Presbyterian Church of Farmington and Palmyra villages dating back to 1820 have not been preserved and membership figures are not available for the Methodist classes held in the neighborhood where Joseph lived, presbytery records and reports of growth in Methodist circuits are available. When representatives of

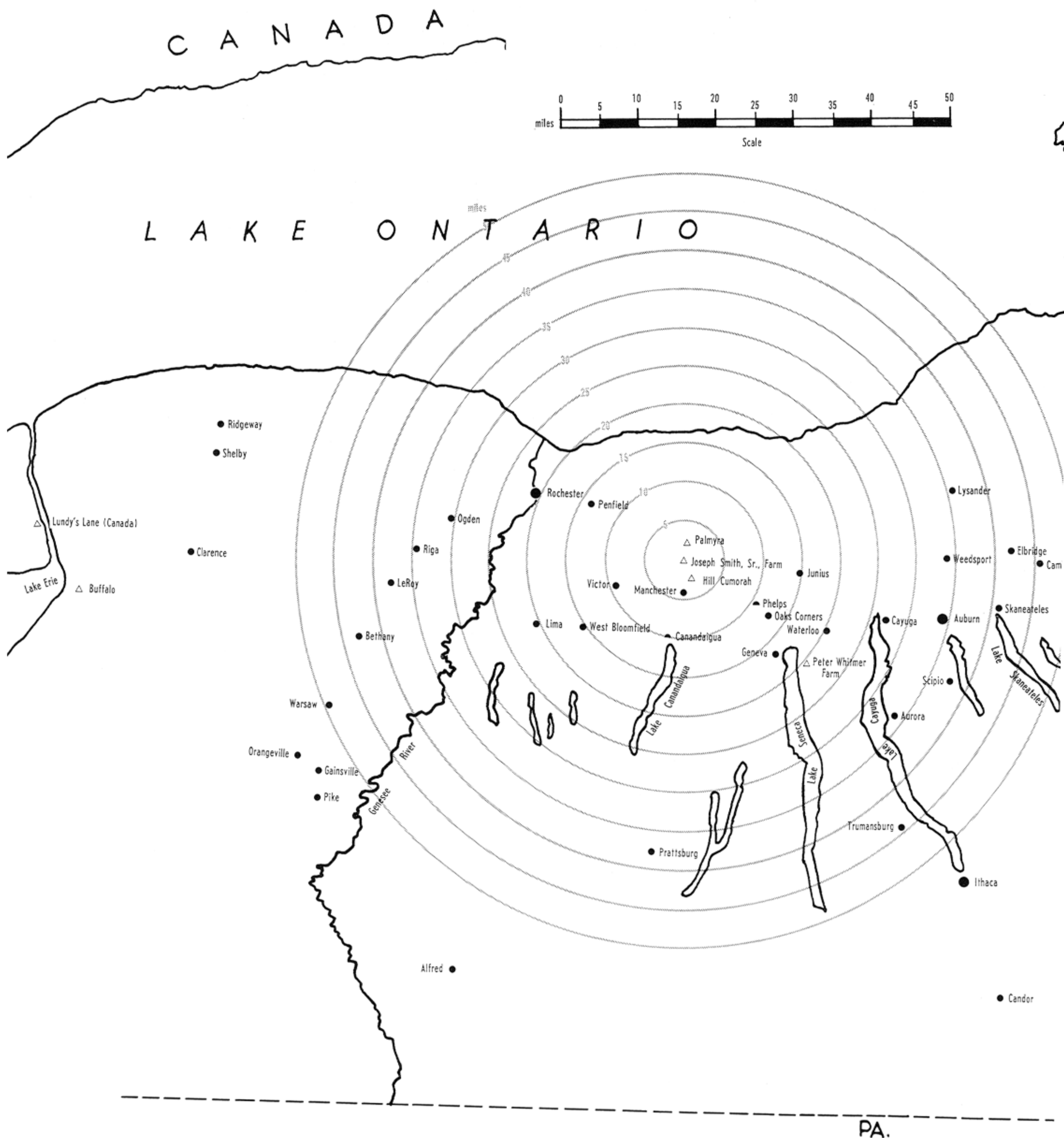
²³"Records of the Church of Christ in Geneva, State of New York," pp. 146-156, 158-159, 136-138, located in the First Presbyterian Church, Geneva, New York; "Minutes of the Session, 1819-1826," pp. 260-286, located in the First Presbyterian Church, Geneva, New York.

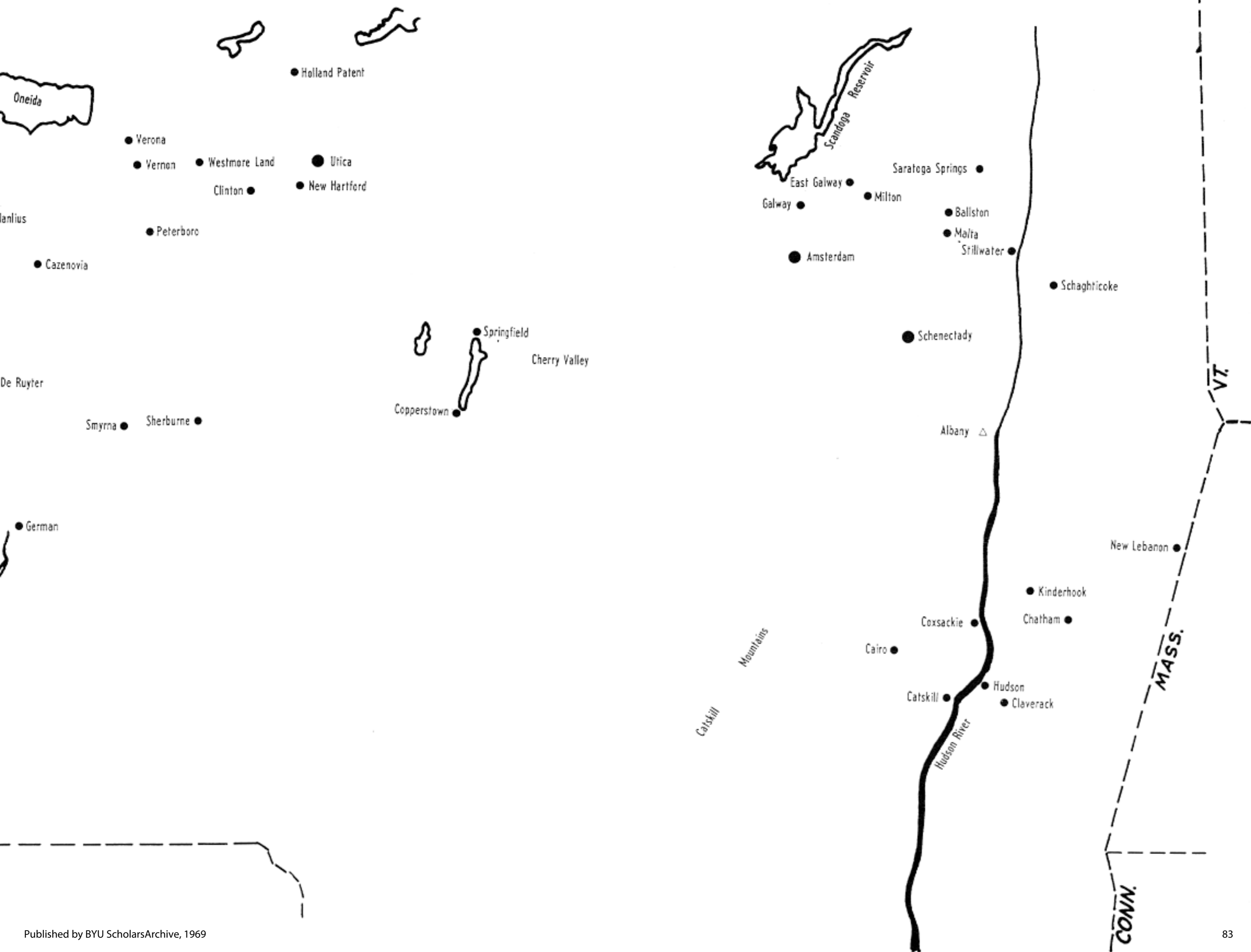
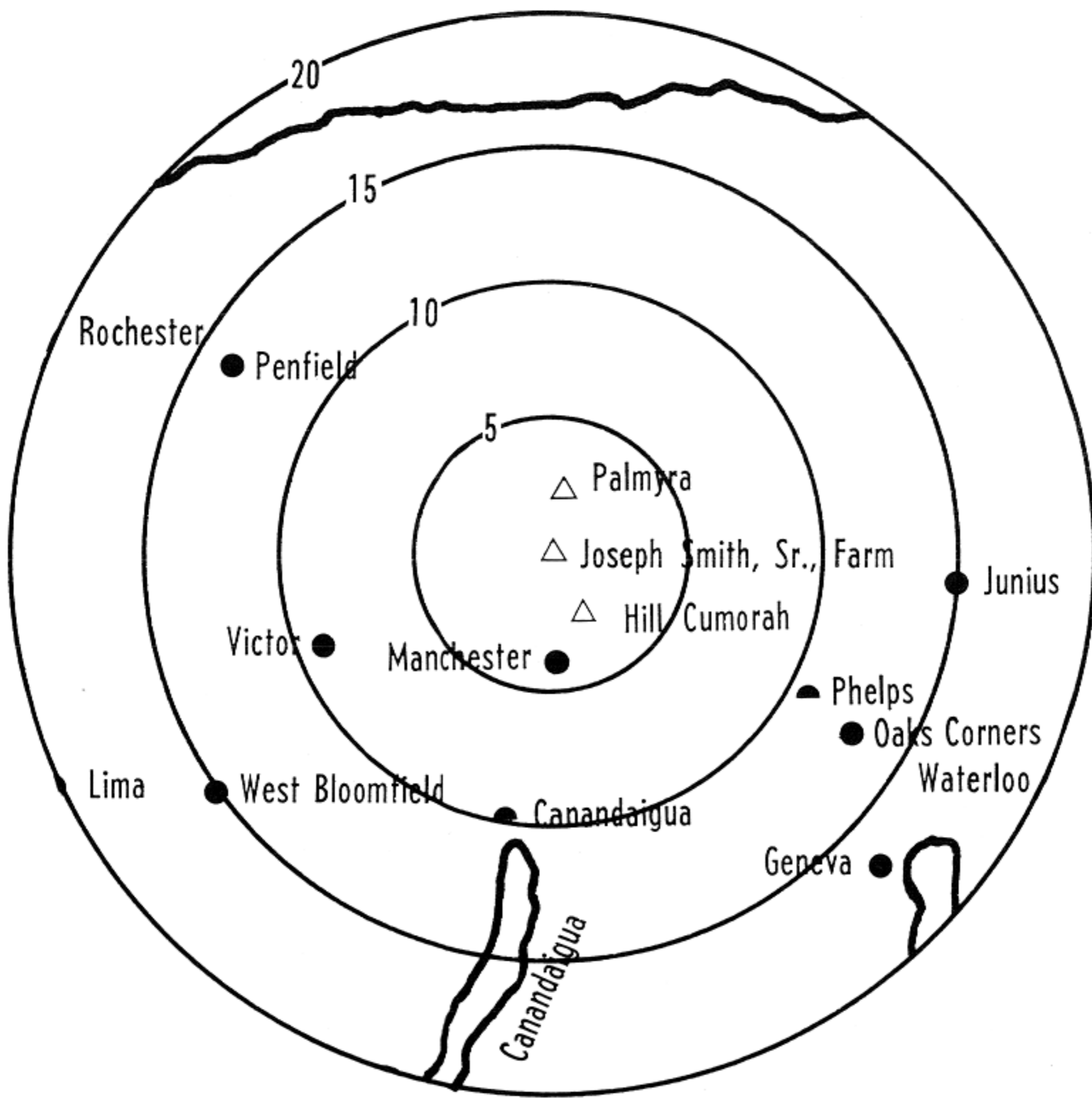
²⁴"Session Book of the First Presbyterian Church in Phelps," Book II, pp. 11-19, located in the Presbyterian Church, Oaks Corners, New York.

²⁵*Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly, of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1821), p. 22; "Records of the Synod of Geneva (1812-1835)," pp. 183, 220-221, copy located in the Brigham Young University library; "Records of the Presbytery of Geneva," Book C, p. 37, copy located in the Brigham Young University library; J. Jemain Porter, *History of the Presbytery of Geneva 1805-1889* (Geneva, 1889), p. 25.

The Great Revival of 1819-1820 in Western, Central, and Upstate New York

- Towns or villages where there were reports of "unusual religious excitement" and/or significant increases in church membership in 1819-1820.
- ▲ Towns or villages located near the Smith farm where there were reports of "prospects of revivals" in 1819-1820.
- △ Indicates location of other landmarks of New York.





the Presbyterian churches assembled in Phelps in February 1820 members of the presbytery of Geneva reported that "During the past year more have been received into the communion of the Churches than perhaps in any former year," and the word "perhaps" has been crossed out in the original record. At this meeting it was also reported that two hundred were added to the churches by examination and eighty-five by certificate (transfer of membership), and only sixteen of the twenty-three churches in this presbytery reported, Palmyra and Farmington being two of the seven churches which failed to report.²⁶ Even though Methodist records indicate that there was no increase in the Ontario Circuit in 1820, in that year membership in the Lyons Circuit doubled, increasing from 374 to 654.²⁷

Evidence that Baptists in the region of country where Joseph lived prospered from the religious stirrings is found in the membership reports of the Baptist Church of Farmington located a few miles south of the Smith farm. Baptist Church membership figures indicate that twenty-two converts were added to this congregation in 1819, which was a significant growth for a church consisting of only 87 members in 1818.²⁸

Freewill Baptists also reported an advancement of spiritual sensitivity in the vicinity of New York where Joseph lived at the time of the First Vision. A quarterly meeting of members of this society was held in Phelps in July 1819 at which time "a profitable season was enjoyed" and five were added to their society. A few months later Freewill Baptists in Junius, a town located east of Phelps, reported a revival in their community; and in the autumn of 1820 fifteen were added to their society. Strife and contention, however, erupted among these Protestants; and some of the newly awakened souls were dismissed from the Baptist society, forming a nondenominational church in Junius and "taking the Scriptures for their only rule of faith and practice."²⁹

In the fall of 1819, Bishop John Henry Hobart, an Episcopalian bishop, visited western New York and received "encour-

²⁶"Records of the Presbytery of Geneva," Book C, pp. 37-38.

²⁷*Methodist Minutes* (1820), p. 27; *Methodist Minutes* (1821), p. 27.

²⁸*Minutes of the Ontario Baptist Association* (Canandaigua, 1818), p. 3; *Minutes of the Ontario Baptist Association* (New York, 1819), p. 2.

²⁹Marks, *Memoirs of the Life of David Marks*, p. 26.

aging reports" from missionaries laboring in Phelps, Waterloo, Bergen, Le Roy, and many other towns of western New York.³⁰

Eastern Christians also benefited from the increased religious fervor which excited many settlers in western New York following the War of 1812. One of the leaders of this restorationist movement, David Millard, preached frequently in West Bloomfield and organized a church in that village in October 1818 with sixteen members. A few months after the inception of this religious society, membership increased to about fifty.³¹

REVIVAL IS CONVERSION FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Although membership records provide one indication of religious activity in a community, occasionally an unusual religious excitement occurred in a neighborhood without resulting in an immediate increase in church membership. Periodically, there was a renewal of religious fervor among church members. Sometimes many seekers were converted to the basic teachings of Christianity but postponed uniting with one of the religious societies located near their homes, and some converts never discovered what they regarded as God's true church. Some "outpourings of the Spirit" have vanished from mankind's memory because a contemporary failed to record the "extension of the power of godliness" or because the primary source was not preserved. As one American of the early Republic asserted, a "revival of religion" is "the translation" of a considerable number of souls in the same congregation or neighborhood "from darkness to light, and from bondage of iniquity to the glorious liberty of the sons of God," which is "attended with an awakening sense of sin and with a change of temper and conduct, which cannot be easily concealed."³²

Many valuable ecclesiastical records dating back to the early nineteenth century have also been preserved that vindicate Joseph Smith's testimony concerning the "whole district of country" being affected by the spiritual awakening of 1819-1820 and "great multitudes" uniting "themselves to the dif-

³⁰Charles Wells Hayes, *The Diocese of Western New York* (Rochester, 1904), p. 53.

³¹McIntosh, *History of Ontario County*, p. 221.

³²Wm. Neill, "Thoughts on Revivals of Religion," *The Christian Herald*, Vol. 7 (April 7, 1821), pp. 708-711.

ferent religious parties." A careful reading of the Prophet's account indicates that the great increase in membership occurred in "the whole district of country," meaning possibly western New York or eastern and western New York and not necessarily Palmyra, Farmington, or just the neighborhood where he lived. Joseph undoubtedly learned that many revivals were occurring in New York in 1819 and 1820. Accounts of the most impressive and productive religious quickenings were widely circulated by preachers, traveling merchants and newspapers. In the summer and early fall of 1820, for example, descriptive accounts of awakenings occurring in central and upstate New York were published in the *Palmyra Register*, a paper which according to Orsamus Turner the Smith family obtained regularly.³³ The June 7, 1820, issue carried a brief report of "Great Revivals in Religion" in the eastern part of the state. This revival was more fully reported on in a later issue. In this later report the Palmyra paper announced that "the face of the country has been wonderfully changed of late." Last summer as a result of a powerful revival forty were added to the church at Saratoga Springs. Shortly thereafter an awakening kindled the settlers of Malta and Stillwater, where in the latter town about two hundred were converted. At Ballston, 118 were added to the church during two communion services. At East Galway, within two months, at least 150 were "hopefully" converted; at Amsterdam, fifty members had been added recently to the church; and, the report concluded, at Nassau, thirty settlers had been converted in less than three weeks.³⁴ And in still a different article the readers of the *Palmyra Register* learned that more than two hundred people had been converted since the first of the year during a great spiritual vitalization which was animating the settlers of Homer.³⁵

Presbyterian Church records provide one of the most valuable insights into the extent and numerical consequences of the great awakening which transformed New York into an ecclesiastical storm center during the years following the termination of the War of 1812, including the years 1819 and 1820. After delegates from Presbyterian churches located

³³Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement*, p. 214.

³⁴*Palmyra Register*, September 13, 1820.

³⁵*Ibid.*, August 16, 1820.

throughout the United States gathered in Philadelphia in May, 1820, they prepared their annual report on the state of religion for the preceding year. "It is with gratitude and heart-felt joy," the delegates asserted, that "the past has been a year of signal and almost unprecedented mercy" as far as "genuine religious revivals" are concerned. When the committee enumerated the areas where "the most copious of these effusions of the Spirit" had been experienced, they specified eight presbyteries, six of which were located in New York. Then they described the congregations where the most significant revivals were occurring. Twenty-two congregations were listed, nineteen of which were located in New York, including Geneva, Homer, Smithfield, Utica, Whitesboro, New Hartford, Clinton, Cooperstown, Sherburne, Pleasant Valley, Stillwater, Malta, Ballstown, Galway, Schenectady, Amsterdam, Marlboro, and Hopewell.³⁶

REVIVAL "FRUITS" IN 1820

The report of the General Assembly for the year ending 1820 indicates that the great New York revival continued during the year of the First Vision. In fact, the "fruits" of the 1820 revivals were considered more "numerous, extensive, and blessed" than in any previous year. Awakenings occurring in fifty-four congregations in New York were specifically mentioned, and this enumeration did not include a special report on the revivals in the presbytery of Albany where "one thousand four hundred" were added to the Presbyterian churches.³⁷

Presbyterian Church membership figures compiled by the General Assembly also reveal that there was not only a significant increase in membership in New York in 1819, but that there was a greater increase there than in any other state. During the year preceding the First Vision, the national increase in Presbyterian Church membership was approximately 6,500, and the increase in New York state alone was 2,250, representing 35 percent of the national total. But what is most significant here is the fact that more than 67 percent or 1,513 of the 2,250 New York converts came from the Burned-over District. This is 23 percent of the national total.³⁸

³⁶*Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly (1820)*, pp. 321-322.

³⁷*Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly (1821)*, pp. 22-23.

³⁸*Minutes of the General Assembly (1820)*, pp. 742-743.

Membership summaries for the Presbyterian Church in western New York for 1820 indicate a decline in membership; the decline is probably due to failure of many Presbyterian churches to report. Although Methodist reports for the region show a decline in 1819, probably because of the reorganization of the Methodist circuits, Methodist membership figures for 1820, indicate that during the year of the First Vision there was an increase of 2,256 members in western New York. This was the largest annual increase reported by this group for that region of America.³⁹

The Baptists were also increasing rapidly in membership in western New York at the time Joseph beheld his remarkable vision. At a triennial meeting of the Baptists held in Philadelphia in 1820, 83 of the 145 associations reported baptisms for the year 1819. Although only ten associations or 12 percent of the alliances of churches which reported were located in New York, these groups recorded 26 percent of the baptisms. In the Empire State, the most significant increases were noted by associations located west of the Catskill Mountains. Madison disclosed 506 baptisms (more than any other Baptist association); Cayuga, 474; Holland Purchase, 262; Franklin, 183; and Genesee, 147. Consequently, in five western New York Baptist associations, there was an increase of more than 1,500 for the year 1819.⁴⁰

When Calvinist Baptists described the region where some of the most powerful revivals occurred in 1820, they reported a profound enhancement of religious sensitivity in Madison, Onandaga, Cortland, and Chenango counties, where Baptists of central New York had formed the Madison Association. About January 1, a spiritual enlivenment commenced in Homer and continued during much of the year. By August, more than

³⁹Although there were significant increases in 1820 in the Onondaga and Oneida presbyteries, the report of the General Assembly for that year indicates a combined decline of more than 2,584 in the Cayuga and Geneva presbyteries with only a reduction of two churches in these presbyteries, indicating that many churches in these presbyteries failed to submit reports in 1821; and two presbyteries, Genesee and Niagara, failed to report. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1820), p. 742; *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., from A.D. 1821 to A.D. 1835 Inclusive* (Philadelphia, n.d.), p. 4; *Methodist Minutes* (1821), pp. 27-28.

⁴⁰*Proceedings of the Baptist General Convention in the United States, at their Second Triennial Meeting, and the Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Managers* (Philadelphia, 1820), pp. 308-309.

one hundred converts had joined the Baptist society in Homer, about one hundred had united with the Baptists in Truxton, and other significant additions were made in the societies located in Nelson, Virgil, Preble, and Scipio. Another "extensive revival" which reached a peak in the spring of 1820 took place in the town of Smithfield, where eighty-four joined the Baptist society in Peterboro and fifty-four in Siloam. The Baptists also reported that many converts were joining Congregational and Presbyterian churches located in central New York. The Seventh-day Baptists noted that great numbers were joining their society in Alfred, a community located southwest of Joseph's home.⁴¹

One witness of the great awakening which erupted in Homer wrote a colorful description of this movement in which he testified that all classes in society were affected by the great and powerful work which had broken forth. Some, he said, who had previously made a confession of religion again searched their hearts, resulting in second rebirth. Others for the first time "fell under the power of truth and exclaimed, 'What shall we do?' Of this class," he observed, "were a great company of the youth of both sexes. The principal means of awakening," he continued, were the "exhortations of the pious, the pathetic expostulations of young converts, and the preaching of the Gospel." The revival, he added, was distinguished by its great solemnity and order, for there was "scarce a feature of enthusiasm or blind zeal visible . . . It ought to be recorded," this witness concluded, "to the honor of Divine grace, that in many instances prayer" was "most signally and speedily answered; whether it was for the conversion of a sinner, or the comfort of a saint under peculiar trials. It has been fully manifested, that those who asketh, receiveth."⁴²

Church records, newspapers, religious journals, and other contemporary sources clearly reveal that great awakenings occurred in more than fifty western New York towns or villages during the revival of 1819-1820. Primary sources also

⁴¹"Revivals of Religion," *The Western New York Baptist Magazine*, Vol. 3 (1820), pp. 60, 90-94, 119-123; *Minutes of the Seventh-day Baptist General Conference* (New Brunswick, 1820), p. 5; "Revivals of Religion," *Religious Intelligencer*, Vol. 4 (February-May, 1820), pp. 570, 668, 699, 717, 751, 770, 822-823; Vol. 5 (September, 1820), pp. 218, 222.

⁴²Alfred Bennet, "Revival of Religion in Homer," *The Western New York Baptist Magazine*, Vol. 3 (November, 1820), pp. 119-121.

specify that great multitudes joined the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Calvinist Baptist societies in the region of country where Joseph Smith lived; and significant additions were also made in western New York communities by the Congregational church, the Christian denomination, the Freewill and Seventh-day Baptist societies, and other Protestant faiths.⁴³

SUMMARY

While summarizing the spiritual quickenings that awakened America into a new reality of the divinity of Christ, one editor declared in 1820 that there were currently more reports of revivals in religious publications than in any previous era.⁴⁴ Although this spiritual phenomenon was certainly not limited to New York, this state, especially the area stretching from Albany to Buffalo, was the ecclesiastical storm center of America at the time one of the most remarkable visions was unfolded to mankind.

The most reliable sources of the early nineteenth century show that Joseph Smith's brief description of the historical setting of the First Vision is in harmony with other contemporary accounts of the religious excitement which took place in the area where he lived and of the great revival which continued in New York in 1819 and 1820. Indeed, the Mormon Prophet penned a reliable description of an awakening which occurred in the Burned-over District at the time he launched his quest for religious truth.

⁴³For additional information on the Great Revival of 1819-1820 in New York see R. Smith, *Recollections of Nettleton*; P. H. Fowler, *Historical Sketch of Presbyterianism*; Joshua Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals in many parts of the United States from 1815 to 1818* (Albany, 1819); and James H. Hotchkin, *History of the Purchase and Settlement of Western New York* (New York, 1848).

⁴⁴"Revivals of Religion," *The Western New York Baptist Magazine*, Vol. 3 (August, 1820), p. 91.

Reverend George Lane— Good “Gifts,” Much “Grace,” and Marked “Usefulness”

Larry C. Porter*

Many of the personalities who touched early Mormonism have drifted into comparative obscurity, their initial roles ill-remembered or undefined. Such has been the lot of the Methodist minister, Rev. George Lane (1784-1859), a figure who, according to certain accounts, was one of those instrumental in moving Joseph Smith to make his epic inquiry of the Lord with the attendant vision of the Father and Son. The renewed research on Mormon origins has generated interest in the activities of Rev. Lane and his contact with Joseph Smith. This new interest has pointed out how very little we know of the Reverend George Lane and this fact motivated this study of the man and his relationship to Mormonism.

The writer enjoyed returning to the area concerned here during the summer of 1968, and searching for the records that yielded the information contained in this article. The experience was made doubly enjoyable by the excellent assistance of Ralph Hazeltine, director of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; Luke A. Sarsfield, a doctoral candidate doing research at the society; Harrison Harvey Smith, editor of the *Wilkes-Barre Record* and a descendant of Sarah Harvey Lane, first wife of Rev. George Lane; and Miss Marion Disque, Wyoming Seminary, Kingston, Pennsylvania. Each generously shared information and materials helpful to this project.

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George Lane was born near Kingston, Ulster County, New York, on April 13, 1784.¹ His birth apparently occurred "not far from the Hudson, after his parents set off from Massachusetts for the wilds of Susquehanna."² He was the sixth child of Nathan Lane (b. Attleboro, Mass., March 20, 1750; d. Lanesboro, Pennsylvania, March 17, 1817) and Dorcas Muscroft (b. March 1, 1751; md. 1772; d. Sept. 8, 1839).³ His brothers and sisters were Daniel, Irene, Betsey, Nathan, David, Asa, Charles and Dorcas.⁴

Lane's father remained for a short time in Ulster County and then moved to Broome County, New York, where he enjoyed the distinction of being the first white settler in Onaquaga, Windsor township.⁵ Similarly, he became the first town supervisor and erected the first gristmill in the area, about 1797. His sons, Nathan, Jr., and David, were still listed as residents in the 1820 census.⁶

George Peck, a fellow preacher and intimate of George Lane, describes the circumstances of his friend's youth in these terms:

The early history of George Lane was marked by the toils, hardships, and exposure common to the life of a boy in a new country. The simple food, often deficient in quantity, and few of the means and appliances of intellectual improvement. In those disadvantages our subject shared a common lot with his fellows. The Puritan morals, piety, books, and reading of his excellent mother exerted a strong moral influence upon his mind while very young. . . .⁷

Early in the nineteenth century, the Lanes settled in what is now Harmony township, Susquehanna (then Luzerne) County, Pennsylvania, "at a place which was afterwards called Lane's Mills, or Lanesville, and is now Lanesboro. This is in the territory which was known as the 'Wyoming region,' and was claimed by the Connecticut Susquehanna Company."⁸ It is not certain whether George went to Harmony township with

¹*Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1860, p. 40.

²*The Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York), June 23, 1859, p. 1.

³Oscar Jewell Harvey, *The Harvey Book* (Wilkes-Barre, 1899), p. 128.

⁴James Hill Fitts, *Lane Genealogies* (Exeter, N.H., 1897), Vol. 2, p. 49.

⁵George Peck, *Early Methodism* (New York, 1860), p. 492.

⁶Marjory B. Hinman and Bernard W. Osborne (comps.), *The White Man Settles Old Onaquaga* (Onaquaga, N.Y., 1968), pp. 15, 17.

⁷*The Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 23, 1859, p. 1.

⁸Harvey, *The Harvey Book*, p. 129.

his family at the time of their removal. He may have taken up "school-keeping" at this juncture. While in Windsor township, he had attended school in the settlement of Windsor, New York, where he made "good proficiency" studying his spelling-book, reading-book, and arithmetic. His highest ambition, subsequently, was to be a schoolteacher, a person much in demand in the new settlements. In the summer of 1802, he was engaged to teach by Putnam Catlin, Esq., at Great Bend (Pennsylvania). During the winter of 1802-1803, he taught in the vicinity of where the community of Kirkwood, New York, is presently located. It was here that George Lane joined the Methodist Church. An account of his conversion has been preserved by Rev. William Round:

Mrs. Moore, of Kirkwood, says that she experienced religion and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church while George Lane was teaching school near where Kirkwood now stands in 1803. Brother Lane experienced religion himself during that winter. He was absent from the school a few days, and when he returned he told his scholars that he had experienced religion, and exhorted them and prayed with them, and a great revival broke out immediately.⁹

Lane was apparently "awakened" through the preaching of James Herron, and was received into the church by Samuel Budd.¹⁰ He reacted favorably toward his religious experience, and "The fervor of his spirit, and his gifts in prayer and exhortation, soon indicated that he was a chosen vessel, destined to be heard at the division of God's sacramental host, then doing battle valiantly upon the frontiers."¹¹

In 1804, George Lane was employed by the presiding elder of the Genesee District as an assistant preacher on the Tioga circuit.¹² The following year he was admitted on trial in the Philadelphia Conference and appointed to the Scipio circuit (New York) with Johnson Dunham.¹³ "The circuit was characterized by what was nothing very peculiar for those times, poverty, bad roads, long rides, small congregations, and a sad deficiency of all the comforts of life. Here he found

⁹Peck, *Early Methodism*, pp. 447-449.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 492.

¹¹*The Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 23, 1859, p. 1.

¹²*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1860, p. 40.

¹³*The Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 23, 1859, p. 1.

hospitality, and here God gave him seals to his ministry.”¹⁴ As an indication of the tremendous distances traveled by this pair of itinerants, the Scipio circuit was six hundred miles in circumference.¹⁵

He remained on trial in 1806, and was appointed by the Philadelphia Conference to the Pompey circuit (New York) with Benjamin Bidlack. “Here also he labored hard and was blessed with fruit.”¹⁶ In 1807, he was admitted into “full connexion” and ordained a deacon by Bishop Francis Asbury.¹⁷ His appointment was to the Accomac circuit on the eastern shore of Virginia:

Here he labored as he was able, amid death-camps, for the salvation of the poor slaves and their masters, and was happy in witnessing the conversation of many of the poor degraded and down-trodden sons of Ham, and their union with the Church of Christ.¹⁸

George Lane was continued as a deacon in 1808 and assigned to the Holland Purchase mission with Thomas Elliott. Their mission included all of New York State west of Canandaigua, and extended along Lake Erie into Pennsylvania. In this unsettled area, Lane was often compelled to travel thirty and forty miles without seeing a house, and frequently suffered from hunger and cold.¹⁹ While laboring under these conditions, Lane conducted the first camp-meeting west of the Genesee River. This gathering was held in Caledonia, now Wheatland. As a result of this and other endeavors, he was able to report the activity of some ninety members.²⁰

George Peck, in his biographical sketch of Lane, details for his readers the difficulties experienced by the itinerant in the Holland Purchase mission during that eventful year of 1808. Of equal value to the researcher is Peck’s preface to the account of those difficulties when he states, “The following extract from Mr. Lane’s diary has been furnished us by his excellent lady [Lydia Bunting Lane, second wife of George Lane], and will give the reader a good idea of his labors and

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁵*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1860, p. 40.

¹⁶*The Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 23, 1859, p. 1.

¹⁷*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1860, p. 40.

¹⁸*The Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 23, 1859, p. 1.

¹⁹*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1860, p. 40.

²⁰Peck, *Early Methodism*, 234-235.

dangers on this new field, and the spirit in which he bore himself under them.”²¹ From this communication it becomes obvious that Rev. Lane maintained a diary of at least a part of his early ministry, and that it was apparently available for reference as late as 1860 (the publication date of Peck’s treatise). I have been unable to locate that diary or to determine whether there was another diary for the 1820’s.

Bishop William M’Kendree ordained George Lane an elder in the Methodist Church in 1809.²² Lane was appointed by the Philadelphia Conference to the Wyoming circuit (Pennsylvania), serving with Abraham Dawson. These ministers conducted the first camp-meeting in Luzerne County, holding the event near the village of Wyoming. A graphic account of the proceedings has been recorded:

A rough board stand was constructed, which was occupied by the preachers during Divine service, and a circle of tents was formed round about, composed of wagon and bed covers stretched over hopped saplings. The floors of the tents were the bare ground concealed by a sprinkling of straw, while the beautiful green foliage of the forest was spread out above them. Multitudes of people collected from far and near, attracted, many by novelty, and some by a desire to do good and to get good. The tremendous emotions of the speaker were communicated to his audience, and an excitement was produced of which we in this day can have but a faint conception. The cries of the penitent, and the shouts of rejoicing Christians, mingled with the deep tones of the preacher, produced a marked effect even on the most obdurate infidel.²³

On July 20, 1810, the Genesee Conference, newly formed by a division of the Philadelphia Conference, held its inaugural gathering at Lyons, New York. The *Journal of the Genesee Conference* for July 23, 1810, specifies that Rev. George Lane was officially located as of that date.²⁴ Broken in health, because of his “former toils and exposure,” he found himself under the necessity of retiring, for a season, from the itiner-

²¹*Ibid.*, 235-238.

²²*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1860, p. 40.

²³Stewart Pearce, *Annals of Luzerne County* (Philadelphia, 1866), p. 294.

²⁴*Journal of the Genesee Conference*, 1810-1828, Vol. 1, pp. 1, 5. This is transcribed copy of the original journal, prepared at the instigation of the Wyoming Conference in 1860. It contains volumes 1 and 2 under a single cover. This transcript is in the Wyoming Seminary, Kingston.

To “locate” is to leave the itinerary and either to become a local minister or to assist in ministerial duties when requested.

ancy.²⁵ According to the records of the old *Steward's Book* of the Wyoming circuit, Lane had, in fact, located shortly after the quarterly meeting in December 1809. The account indicates that in March 1810 Samuel Carver received traveling expenses and one-fourth salary for one quarter in Lane's stead. From March to July 1810 Loring Grant traveled the Wyoming circuit in place of George Lane.²⁶

Among the active adherents to the Methodist faith on the Wyoming circuit was Miss Sarah Harvey of Plymouth township, daughter of Elisha and Rosanna (Jameson) Harvey. Evidence of Sarah's interest in religious matters is indicated by a remembrance from 1808:

The stone church at Brier Creek was the rallying point for the Methodist people from Milton, Lewisburgh, Northumberland, Wyoming Valley and surrounding country. At the quarterly meetings, held at Christian and Thomas Bowman's, before the church was built, people came thirty-five miles, men and women, on horseback. From Wyoming Valley: Ann Denison, Sarah Brown, Sarah Harvey (afterward wife of Rev. George Lane), Eunice Wakeman, niece of Mrs. Joseph Wright, a young woman of extraordinary mind and talents.²⁷

While serving the Wyoming circuit, Lane became acquainted with Sarah and the couple were married at Plymouth, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, on May 31, 1810. Six children were born to this union, Sally Ann, Harvey Bradburn, George Washington, Charles Asbury, Mary Butler and Joseph Jameson.²⁸ Harvey Bradburn became professor of languages at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, and a New York businessman.²⁹ George Washington was a licensed minister for the Methodist Church in Georgia and was subsequently called to the chair of ancient languages at Emory College, Oxford, Georgia.³⁰ Joseph Jameson became a minister of the Methodist Church and a teacher.³¹

When George Lane withdrew from the itineracy, he entered the mercantile business in partnership with his youngest

²⁵*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1860, pp. 40-41.

²⁶*Stewards' Book For Wyoming Surket* [sic], 1804-1810. The original Stewards' Book is at the Wyoming Seminary, Kingston, Pennsylvania.

²⁷Peck, *Early Methodism*, p. 166.

²⁸Harvey, *The Harvey Book*, pp. 132-134.

²⁹F. C. Johnson, *The Historical Record* (Wilkes-Barre, 1888), Vol. 2, p. 191.

³⁰William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Methodist Pulpit* (New York, 1861), p. 811.

³¹Harvey, *The Harvey Book*, p. 134.

brother Charles. They purchased a stock of general merchandise from Joseph Wright and set up operation in the store-room formerly occupied by Mr. Wright at the lower end of the village of Plymouth. This partnership was dissolved by mutual consent on September 21, 1812, and George Lane continued alone until the early part of 1814, when Benjamin Harvey, his brother-in-law and clerk in the store, joined him as a partner. They then moved from the Wright storeroom "to a building which stood where Smith's Opera House now stands in Plymouth."³² In October, 1814, a second store was opened in Wilkes-Barre:

. . . the firm of Lane and Harvey opened a store "with a general assortment of goods suitable to the season," in Wilkesbarre at the stand formerly occupied by J. and W. Barnes, on north side of the Public Square, near the corner of West Market street, on land now covered by the large department store of Jonas Long's sons. Mr. Lane, having erected a dwelling-house between the store building and the corner, occupied it with his family and managed the Wilkesbarre store, while Mr. Harvey took charge of the business at Plymouth. At these two stores business was carried on until April, 1816, when, the partnership having been dissolved, the store at Plymouth was closed, and Mr. Lane became sole owner of the Wilkesbarre establishment.³³

Lane was Collector of Taxes for Plymouth township in 1813, and in 1818 he was elected Treasurer of the Wilkesbarre Bridge Company.³⁴ He became a stockholder in that company, originally having twenty shares of stock which increased to forty by 1824.³⁵

Despite his retirement from the itineracy, Rev. Lane did not divorce himself from certain ministerial performances. He continued to preach occasionally and was called upon to address various congregations in Wilkes-Barre and surrounding communities. He also assisted other ministers: "In his house the preachers ever found a pleasant home, and in him a true friend and wise counselor."³⁶

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 130. See, *Susquehanna Democrat* (Wilkes-Barre), October 21, 1814, for announcement of the opening of the new store in Wilkes-Barre.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Letter of Luke A. Sarsfield to Larry C. Porter, Oct. 22, 1968. Certain primary documents of the Wilkesbarre Bridge Company are located in the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

³⁶George Peck, *The Life and Times of Rev. George Peck* (New York, 1874), p. 97.

In 1818 George Lane participated in a camp meeting conducted in the mountains west of the valley. At the close of the gathering, and as the caravan was moving down the mountain, one Betsey Myers, pricked in her heart, "alighted from the wagon and fell upon her knees in the shade of a clump of oak and pine shrubs by the side of the road, crying, 'God have mercy upon me a poor wicked sinner!' The way was soon blocked up. The whole train was arrested, and the attention of all was attracted to a little group of young ladies.³⁷ For several hours the impromptu camp meeting proceeded while the cries of the penitents were followed by shouts of deliverance. Following this event a strong religious influence pervaded the entire charge. Unfortunately the preachers on the local and district level were obliged to attend the annual Genesee Conference at Lansing, Cayuga County, New York, July 16, 1818, and were unable to meet the demands for assistance created by "the little camp-meeting." However, Rev. Lane and other local preachers came to their aid:

The cause was in good hands. The Rev. George Lane, who had rendered good service at the camp-meeting, and had been present and deeply interested at the wayside meeting, took charge of the work while the preachers were at conference. He was then a local preacher and resided in Wilkes-barre. "Father Bidlack" and "Brother Lane" did the preaching, while Darius Williams managed the prayer-meetings. Influential families became interested in the revival and were identified with the Methodist Episcopal Church. Mr. Lane took the names of those who wished to join the society and reported them to the preacher after conference.³⁸

His health restored, and anxious to associate once again with the active ministry, Rev. Lane sold his stock at the Wilkes-Barre store in March 1819³⁹ and reentered the itineracy. On Thursday, July 1, 1819, he was in attendance at the annual Genesee Conference convened in Vienna (afterwards Phelps), Ontario County, New York. The following day, Friday, July 2, at "9 o'clock AM. Conference met. George Lane, Gideon Draper, Wm. Snow and Thomas Wright were again received into the traveling connexion."⁴⁰

³⁷Peck, *Early Methodism*, pp. 311-313.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 313.

³⁹Harvey, *The Harvey Book*, p. 130.

⁴⁰*Journal of the Genesee Conference, 1810-1828*, Vol. 1, p. 77.



Reverend George Lane from the *Methodist Magazine*, April 1826.

The conference was in session over a period of eight days, July 1 to July 8, 1819. Abel Stevens gives us some appreciation of the general pattern which evolved at such conferences of the Methodist Church:

These annual assemblies became imposing occasions. A bishop presided; the preachers from many miles around, usually including several states, were present; hosts of laymen were spectators. There was preaching in the early morning, in the afternoon, and at night. The daily proceedings were introduced with religious services, and were characterized by an impressive religious spirit. They continued usually a week, and it was a festal season, gathering the war-worn heroes of many distant and hard-fought fields, renewing the intimacies of preachers and people, and crowned alike by social hospitalities and joyous devotions.⁴¹

The presence of some 110 ministers and their bishop, Bishop R. R. Roberts, at the Genesee Conference meetings, representing the New York, Pennsylvania, and the Upper and Lower Canada districts, must have created at least a moderate stir in the immediate neighborhood.⁴² This places Reverend George Lane within a fifteen mile vicinity of Manchester, attending the largest Methodist meeting of the year in western New York, among a great number of Methodist ministers, at a time when Joseph Smith was aware of "an unusual excitement on the subject of religion" ("some time in the second year [1819] after our removal to Manchester").

Whether or not Joseph attended some of these meetings cannot be determined from any records presently available, but the opportunity cannot be denied—if only to sell confectioneries.⁴³ To think that the Smiths would not have heard of the gathering is hardly believable.

Rev. Lane was appointed Presiding Elder of the Susquehanna District at the conference. He was so named because he was one "who incessantly travels his extensive territory, preaching, counseling the traveling and Local Preachers and Exhorters, meeting the official members of the circuit Societies, and promoting the interest of the Church in every possible

⁴¹Abel Stevens, *The Centenary of American Methodism* (New York, 1865), p. 112.

⁴²*Minutes of the Annual Conferences, 1819*, pp. 50-52.

⁴³Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (Palmyra, 1867), p. 12.

way.”⁴⁴ The circuits which comprised the Susquehanna District, in 1819, were the Bald Eagle, Lycoming, Shamoking, Northumberland, Wyoming, Canaan, Bridgewater, Wyalusing, Tioga, and Wayne.⁴⁵ The following year, 1820, the Broome circuit was placed under Lane’s jurisdiction.⁴⁶

Rev. Lane’s geographical assignment prompts some interesting speculation relative to his possible acquaintance with certain individuals who were later to become principals in the advent of Mormonism. Living within the confines of the district, at Harmony, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, immediately west of the community of Oakland, on the Susquehanna River, were Isaac Hale, his wife Elizabeth and their nine children, among whom was Emma, future wife of Joseph Smith. The Hale family were devout Methodists, Isaac and Elizabeth being numbered among the members of the first class conducted at Lanesboro, Pennsylvania, some two miles east of their Harmony home:

The first class at Lanesboro was formed in 1810 by Mr. Grant, or in 1812 by Bro. King. It included John and Phoebe Gildersleeve Comfort, Isaac and Elizabeth Hale, Nathaniel and Sarah Lewis, Marmaduke and Clarisa Salsbury, and James Newman and Betsey Rouse; and if not at first, soon after, Mary Hilborn.⁴⁷

The preachers on the Broome circuit, in 1816, found a cordial reception at the Hale home and one of their appointments was in a little log schoolhouse, near the Hale homestead, “to a small but earnest congregation.”⁴⁸ In the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, the content of an affidavit asserts that “Father Hale’s house was the preacher’s home. . . .”⁴⁹ Under these circumstances, it is a distinct possibility that Rev. Lane, in his capacity of “meeting the official members of the circuit societies,” may well have known the Hale family. The prospect is heightened when we recall that George Lane grew up in Windsor township, Broome County, New York, at a location some ten miles north of the Hale’s place, and that his

⁴⁴Stevens, *The Centenary of American Methodism*, p. 111.

⁴⁵*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1819, pp. 51-52.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁷Rev. Albert Clarke, *Methodist Episcopal Church, Lanesboro, Pennsylvania 1812-1912* (Lanesboro, 1912), p. 11.

⁴⁸*Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, p. 68.

⁴⁹Rev. George Peck, “Mormonism and the Mormons,” *Methodist Quarterly Review III* (January 1843), 112.

parents, Nathan and Dorcus Lane, lived for many years at Lanesboro, Pennsylvania, within a few miles of Isaac and Elizabeth Hale.

Rev. Lane would most assuredly have been acquainted with Isaac Hale's brother-in-law, Nathaniel Lewis. Nathaniel had married Sarah Hale, and lived just across the Susquehanna River from Isaac. He was a deacon in the Methodist faith, having been ordained by Bishop Asbury on July 12, 1807.⁵⁰ "Nathaniel Lewis, an ordained local preacher, was deeply pious, shrewd, witty, and at home in the rough-and-tumble polemics of the time. He preached and formed classes at Jackson, Thompson, Starruca and other places."⁵¹ Lewis was one of those who strenuously challenged the validity of Joseph Smith's claims. He was still preaching in that vicinity as late as 1835, prior to moving west.⁵²

On September 13, 1819, Rev. George Lane and Marmaduke Pierce preached with telling effect at a camp meeting held at Carpenter's Notch, Wyoming circuit. From the account we derive some feeling for Rev. Lane's persuasive abilities from the stand:

Marmaduke Pierce preached a short but mighty sermon, and closed with a perfect storm. He addressed the wicked with tremendous power, and then, exclaiming, "I feel the Spirit of God upon me, Glory, halleluia!" dropped down upon the seat behind him, shouting, weeping, laughing, wonderfully moved. The joyous responses from the preachers and the assemblage arose like the sound of many waters, while the whole congregation shook like the forest in mighty wind. The exhortations of the presiding elder, George Lane, were overwhelming. Sinners quailed under them, and many cried aloud for mercy. The meeting included the Sabbath, and continued about a week. Sixty persons professed to find peace, and thirty joined the church.⁵³

The 1820 annual Genesee Conference convened at Lundy's Lane, Niagara, Upper Canada, on Thursday, July 20, 1820. Rev. George Lane was present at the gathering and on July 24, was examined and "passed."⁵⁴ Lane was an active partici-

⁵⁰*Methodist Episcopal Church, Lansboro, Pennsylvania, 1812-1912*, p. 9.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 11-12.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 12. See, *Early Methodism*, pp. 332-333.

⁵³*Life and Times of Rev. George Peck*, pp. 108-109.

⁵⁴*Journal of the Genesee Conference, 1810-1828*, pp. 85, 92. Reference is to the annual examination of each itinerant to approve him for continued service.

pant in the proceedings of the conference, being named to at least two committees. In the first instance, July 20, he was elected to a three-man "committee of temporalities" with Abner Chase and Charles Giles.⁵⁵ George Lane reported to the conference the findings of that committee via the following resolutions:

Resolved 1st. That this Conference highly disapproved of the departure of some of its members in the fashion of their coats and hats, and the manner of wearing their hair from the plainness of dress, which characterizes the great body of Methodist preachers.

Resolved 2nd. That we use every consistent measure to bring back the members of our church, to that simplicity and plainness of dress, which we believe to be consistent with the Gospel and our Discipline.

Resolved 3rd. That we enforce more thoroughly the rules of our Discipline, especially those that relate to class-meetings, Love feasts, the use of ardent spirits, and dress.

The above resolutions were adopted.⁵⁶

Lane also served on still another committee of three, which investigated the inroads of Free Masonry into the Methodist itineracy in the Genesee Conference, and which committee formed these resolutions:

Resolved, that this Conference consider it an impropriety for any of its members to attach themselves to, or attend the Masonic Lodge, inasmuch it is contrary to the Apostolic teaching, "to avoid every appearance of evil" and for as much as it grieves the feelings of a considerable number of our pious brethren.

Resolved, Secondly, that if any traveling preachers belonging to this Conference, shall hereafter attach himself to, or persist in attending the Lodges, he be delt with as in other cases of imprudent conduct.

Both resolutions adopted.⁵⁷

Lane's service on the latter committee subsequently caused him considerable discomfiture. In his home community of Wilkes-Barre, where he had been affiliated with the Masons, certain persons proceeded to "implicate and assail his character." On September 24, 1823, Lodge No. 61, F. and A. M. (Free and Accepted Masons), having been appraised of the

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁵⁶*Journal of the Genesee Conference, 1810-1828*, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 90.

resolutions made at the Genesee Conference of 1820, and ascribing their authorship to Rev. Lane, formulated some resolutions of their own, calling for an investigating committee.⁵⁸ The efforts of the committee resulted in a carefully framed letter from George Lane to the members of the Free Mason Lodge. His detailed reply to the charges leveled against him is a classic representation of his powers of diplomacy in ameliorating a tense situation between the Methodist clergy and the Masonic Society.⁵⁹

If the proceedings of the year 1820 were consequential in the life of George Lane, they were certainly no less momentous for Joseph Smith, residing at Manchester, Ontario County, New York. Joseph attested that early in the spring of 1820 he retired to a previously designed place of seclusion and knelt in prayer. His efforts culminated in a heavenly manifestation:

I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun; which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description) standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said (pointing to the other) This is my beloved Son, hear Him!⁶⁰

Joseph asserted that his vision of the Father and the Son came as from the motivation of an unusual excitement on the subject of religion, generated by various sects, and affecting "the whole district of country."⁶¹ The question necessarily arises "Was Rev. George Lane among the religionists promoting the revivalistic excitement in the area, and in particular, was he a personal instigator of Joseph's design to pray?"

In the pursuit of his ministerial duties, Rev. Lane was in the geographical proximity of Joseph Smith on a number of occasions between the years 1819-1825. The nature, degree, or indeed the actuality of their acquaintanceship during this interval poses a number of interesting possibilities.

⁵⁸Oscar Jewell Harvey, *A History of Lodge No. 61, F. and A.M., Wilkes-barre, Pa.* (Wilkes-Barre, 1877), p. 63.

⁵⁹Letter of George Lane to the members of the Free Mason Lodge in Wilkes-barre, n.d. A copy of the original letter is located at the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. See also, *A History of Lodge No. 61 F. and A.M., Wilkesbarre, Pa.*, pp. 63-65.

⁶⁰*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, (April 1, 1842), p. 748.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 2:5.

For eight days, July 1, 1819 to July 8, 1819, George Lane was in attendance at the annual Genesee Conference at Vienna, New York (now Phelps), some fifteen miles southeast of the Smith farm at Manchester.⁶² In July 1820 Lane would have had to pass through the greater Palmyra-Manchester vicinity on his way to Niagara, Upper Canada, to attend the conference held at Lundy's Lane, July 20 to July 26, 1820,⁶³ unless he went by an extremely circuitous route. Present records do not specify Lane's itinerary or exact route of travel to and from Niagara, but they do for Lane's friend, Rev. George Peck, who lived at Kingston, Pennsylvania, just across the Susquehanna River from Lane at Wilkes-Barre. His conference route took him north to Ithaca, then on to a camp meeting in the Holland Purchase, subsequently passing along the Ridge Road, and after two weeks arriving at Lundy's Lane. His return journey was by way of the Ridge Road to Rochester and then on to Auburn, New York.⁶⁴ A quick look at the map of New York state will show that Palmyra is almost on a direct line between Rochester and Auburn. If Lane followed a similar avenue, it would have brought him very close to the neighborhood of the Smith home. As Rev. Peck, he may even have stopped at a camp meeting somewhere along the way. A preacher of his standing would always be a welcome guest.

CONFERENCE AGAIN IN PHELPS IN 1822

The Genesee Conference for 1822 was again held at Vienna, Ontario County, New York, July 24 to August 2, 1822. Rev. Lane was present, examined and passed. He was also called to serve on two committees, one concerned the examination of manuscripts for publication and the other, the receipt of communications relative to the establishment of auxiliary societies.⁶⁵ For some ten days, Rev. Lane was once again within a few miles of Manchester.

From July 1819 to July 1823, Lane served as supervising elder of the Susquehanna District. During the interval from July 1823 to July 1824, his appointment was the Wyoming

⁶²*Journal of the Genesee Conference, 1810-1828, pp. 76-84.*

⁶³*Ibid.*, pp. 85-104.

⁶⁴*Life and Times of Rev. George Peck, pp. 114-117.*

⁶⁵*Journal of the Genesee Conference, 1810-1828, pp. 119-140.*

circuit.⁶⁶ In July 1824 he was once more assigned as a presiding elder, this time, however, to the Ontario District. The Ontario District then comprised the circuits of Lyons, Ontario, Seneca, Crooked Lake, Canadaigua and Geneva, Canisteo and Bath, and Prattsburgh.⁶⁷ For an entire year, then, July 1824 to July 1825, Lane presided over the district within the confines of which the Smith family resided (Manchester was probably on the Ontario circuit). On January 25, 1825, Rev. Lane addressed a glowing letter to the editors of the *Methodist Magazine* in which he outlined the unusual successes being enjoyed in the Ontario District. An entry of particular interest, states

December 11th and 12th our quarterly meeting for Ontario circuit was held in Ontario. It was attended with showers of blessings, and we have reason to believe that much good was done. Here I found that the work which had for some time been going on in Palmyra, had broken out from the village like a mighty flame, and was spreading in every direction. When I left the place, December 22nd, there had, in the village and its vicinity, upward of one hundred and fifty joined the society, besides a number that had joined other churches, and many that had joined no church.⁶⁸

From the foregoing evidence, it is easy to see that Joseph Smith could have had contact with Rev. Lane at a number of points during this extended period. If such an acquaintance existed, when would it have been? Oliver Cowdery, in December 1834, undertook to enlighten the readers of the *Messenger and Advocate* on the circumstances shaping the earliest foundations of the Church. As he prepared to recount the events of Joseph's "15th year" (1820), he prefaced his remarks with this statement:

It is necessary to premise this account by relating the situation of the public mind relative to religion, at this time:

One Mr. Lane, a presiding Elder of the Methodist church, visited Palmyra and vicinity. Elder Lane was a tallented [sic] man possessing a good share of literary endowments, and apparent humility. There was a great awakening, or excitement raised on the subject of religion, and much inquiry for the word of life. Large additions were made to the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches.—Mr. Lane's manner of

⁶⁶*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1823, p. 50.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 1824, p. 52.

⁶⁸Rev. George Lane, "Revival of Religion on Ontario District," *The Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 8, (1825), p. 160.

communication was peculiarly calculated to awaken the intellect of the hearer, and arouse the sinner to look about him for safety—much good instruction was always drawn from his discourses on the scriptures, and in common with others, our brother's mind became awakened.⁶⁹

Cowdery's account at this juncture is in harmony with Joseph Smith's relative to the circumstances of 1820. However, in his next letter to the *Messenger and Advocate*, February 1835, he retracts his initial statement and says:

You will recollect that I mentioned the time of a religious excitement, in Palmyra and vicinity to have been in the 15th year of our brother J. Smith Jr's age—that was an error in the type—it should have been in the 17th.—You will please remember this correction, as it will be necessary for the full understanding of what will follow in time. This would bring the date down to the year 1823.⁷⁰

Cowdery, thus circumvents the happenings of 1820 by omitting any entry relative to the "First Vision." Instead, he suddenly moves ahead three years, identifies the religious fervor, and begins the account with the visit of the angel on the evening of September 21, 1823. However, by including an account of the appearance of the Father and Son in his 1838 account and by identifying the time as "early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty," Joseph Smith filled in the omissions in Cowdery's letter and then continued to narrate the events of his life up until the time and events Cowdery noted find their sequence.⁷¹

Years later, in 1883, William Smith, Joseph's younger brother gave his reminiscences of Rev. Lane on the scene:

In 1822 and 1823, the people in our neighborhood were very much stirred up with regard to religious matters by the preaching of a Mr. Lane, an Elder of the Methodist Church, and celebrated throughout the country as a "great revival preacher."⁷²

⁶⁹*The Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland), December, 1834, 42.

⁷⁰*The Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1, February, 1835), p. 78.

⁷¹"Joseph Smith, "Journal History of the Church,"—"Documentary History of the Church" (MSS, in LDS Church Historian's Office), Book A-1, pp. 1-3. See also Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1902), Vol. 1, pp. 2-6. (Hereafter cited as DHC.)

⁷²William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, Iowa, 1883), p. 6.

Again, in 1893, just prior to his death, William further identified Rev. Lane as one who was directly responsible for Joseph's prayerful inquiry:

Rev. Mr. Lane of the Methodists preached a sermon on "What church shall I join?" And the burden of his discourse was to ask God, using as a text, "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally." And of course when Joseph went home and was looking over the text he was impressed to do just what the preacher had said, and going out in the woods with child like, simple trusting faith believing that God meant just what He said, kneeled down and prayed. . . .⁷³

What were the recollections of Joseph himself relative to an association with Rev. Lane? Nowhere in the Prophet's writings does he appear to have mentioned George Lane by name. He does speak of a certain Methodist minister who was active in the revival sequence, and in whom he confided the aspects of his vision, but he fails to identify the man.⁷⁴

Lucy Mack Smith, another principal in those eventful days, similarly makes no mention of him by name. Amidst the profusion of dates ascribed to Joseph's vision, it is important to note that Mother Smith, an eye witness, does confirm Joseph's dating of that experience as the spring of 1820.⁷⁵

What of Rev. George Lane's own expressions relative to Joseph Smith or Mormonism? The writer has thus far been unable to find any account, public or private, which would indicate his personal reactions either to the Prophet or the Mormon sect. However, there were certain circumstances, outside of the Ontario scene, which may well have prompted Lane to make some comment on Mormonism. Irene, an older sister of Rev. Lane, lived among the Mormons and became a member of the Church near the end of her life. She married David Foote at Windsor, Broome County, New York in 1791, and in the fall of 1798, they moved to Dryden, Cayuga (now Tompkins) County, New York. During the spring of 1830, David borrowed a copy of the Book of Mormon from a neighbor and after reading it, testified that it was a true book. In Novem-

⁷³*Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City), January 20, 1894, 11.

⁷⁴Joseph Smith, "Journal History" (MS in LDS Historian's Library) Book A-1, p. 3. See also DHC. Vol. 1, p. 6.

⁷⁵Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and his Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, 1853), pp. 74, 76.

ber, 1833, he journeyed to Geneseo, Livingston County, New York, to investigate the new religion. While there, he was baptized by Elder John Murdock. As a result of David's conversion, his daughter, Betsey, another daughter, and a son, Warren, linked their fortunes to the Mormon faith. Irene died at Montebello, Illinois, March 5, 1846, and was buried in the Nauvoo cemetery.⁷⁶

Rev. George Lane's wife, Sarah, in ill health, had not accompanied her husband to his 1824 appointment as presiding elder of the Ontario District, but rather, had remained in Wilkes-Barre. As her health continued to fail, Lane elected to "locate" in 1825. For nine years, 1825-1834, he was engaged as a merchant in Berwick, Pennsylvania. "But these were not years of idleness; he had his regular appointments for twenty miles around Berwick, and many in that region will arise and call him blessed."⁷⁷

Sarah Harvey Lane died on October 11, 1832, in Kingston, Pennsylvania, while visiting at the home of the Pierce Butler family.⁷⁸ Lane continued his mercantile business for a season, but again unable to stay away from the itinerant ministry, he sold his interest in the store and was admitted into the Oneida Conference in 1834 (the Oneida Conference had been formed in 1829 by a division of the old Genesee Conference). He was once more appointed as presiding elder of the Susquehanna District, making his residence at Wilkes-Barre in his house on the public square.⁷⁹

The General Conference of the Methodist Church elected George Lane assistant book agent in 1836. He removed to New York City and transferred his relations to the New York Conference. In September, 1840, he became book agent. In all, he served the Methodist Book Concern for a total of sixteen years. During twelve of those years he held the office of treasurer of the missionary society.⁸⁰

⁷⁶Warren Foote, "Autobiography of Warren Foote, 1817-1879," an unpublished journal. The special circumstances of her baptism on February 28, 1846 are stated on page 86. For information of her husband and of her burial see also Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City, 1901), Vol. 1, pp. 374-375.

⁷⁷*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1860, p. 41.

⁷⁸Harvey, *The Harvey Book*, p. 132.

⁷⁹*The Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 23, 1859, p. 1.

⁸⁰*Minutes of the Annual Conferences*, 1860, p. 41. See, H. C. Jennings, *The Methodist Book Concern, A Romance of History* (New York, 1924), pp. 82-83, for additional information on Lane's activity in the Book Concern.

In New York, Rev. Lane met Miss Lydia Bunting. They were married January 24, 1837.⁸¹ Two children were born to the couple, Sarah Georgiana and Lydia.⁸² In 1852, Lane received a superannuated relation and at the age of sixty-eight, he and his wife retired to Mount Holly, New Jersey. With Lane's health declining, it was thought best to return him to more familiar surroundings amidst family and friends in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Rev. George Lane died there on May 6, 1859, age seventy-five, at the home of his son, Charles A. Lane.⁸³ He was buried beside his first wife, Sarah Harvey Lane, in the Hollenback cemetery, at Wilkes-Barre.

In passing, he was memorialized by his life-long friend, Rev. George Peck:

After a most intimate acquaintance with the Rev. George Lane, of more than forty years, observing him under a great variety of circumstances, and some of them exceedingly difficult and trying, we can say what we can say of only a few individuals, that we never saw in him anything to reprove, or anything which, all things considered, deserves to be characterized as a fault. We love to contemplate the history, both the inward and the outward life, of this holy man and eminent servant of Jesus Christ. He has a high seat in heaven. He "turned many to righteousness," and he "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever." He was in deed and in truth, our friend for many long years, and we loved him. May God give us more of his excellent spirit; and now that he has gone to heaven in a chariot of fire, may his mantle fall upon his sons in the Gospel.⁸⁴

Having examined in detail the life of the Christian gentleman, Rev. George Lane, the writer affirms the epitaph inscribed to the itinerants of the old Genesee Conference: a "ministry of good 'gifts,' much 'grace,' and marked 'usefulness' ".⁸⁵

⁸¹Harvey, *The Harvey Book*, p. 132.

⁸²*Lane Genealogies*, II, 69.

⁸³Harvey, *The Harvey Book*, p. 132.

⁸⁴*The Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 23, 1859, p. 1.

⁸⁵Rev. F. W. Conable, *History of the Genesee Annual Conference* (New York, 1885), p. 21.

How Authentic Are Mormon Historic Sites in Vermont and New York?

T. Edgar Lyon*

“Faith needs roots in stone and mortar that the future may learn from the past.” (Guideline of Restored Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia.)

Commencing in 1903 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, having firmly established itself in the Far West, was bold enough to turn its face eastward to look back at its places of origin. Under the direction of President Joseph F. Smith, Carthage Jail was the first site acquired in this movement, because of the nostalgic feelings of the Mormon people for their beloved prophet who had been murdered there. Still further eastward the Church leaders pursued the course of the Church which the previous century had seen moving ever westward. In Vermont and New York places of great historical, theological, and religious importance were located and purchased. Now, more than a half a century since this renewed interest in important historical sites, it is time for a second look and more thorough confirmation of places.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF JOSEPH SMITH, SHARON, VERMONT

Between 1905 and 1907 the Church acquired title to 283 acres of land in Sharon Township, Windsor County, Vermont, which included the homestead of the family which Lucy Mack Smith came from. Under the able management of Junius F. Wells, a memorial cottage was constructed and a massive granite monument to Joseph Smith, Jr., was erected. These

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were dedicated on the hundredth anniversary of the Prophet's birth, viz., December 23, 1905.¹ This was the beginning of the Church's efforts to identify and appropriately designate historic sites in the East which related to important events in the restoration of the gospel and the founding and development of the Church.

Property deeds to the four parcels of land which constitute the old Mack homestead, and which were recorded in the proper courthouse records, make certain that this was the farming land of the progenitors of Lucy Mack Smith. On a tract of that extent, in days of premachine farming, it was inevitable that a number of dwellings would have been constructed for farm laborers during the course of the more than a century and a half prior to 1905. Assisted by property deeds, legal records, and local tradition, Wells located the home site on which Joseph Smith, Sr., and his wife, Lucy Mack, were residing at the time of their son Joseph's birth. Wells reported that he found a pile of logs on the land which it was assumed had been the Smith residence, and ". . . down among the logs . . ." he found an old hearthstone.² This became the center about which the fireplace, hearth, and chimney were reconstructed as the memorial cottage was built. Today the hearthstone is separately memorialized and new buildings have replaced the cottage.

In 1905 little more could have been done to authenticate the site. But twentieth century historians can utilize newly developed social and mechanical sciences which are auxiliaries to their research. One of these is historic-site archaeology. The hearthstone may be the identical one by which Mother Smith cooked the meals and around which the family gathered for warmth during the long winter evenings. But it may have belonged to a dwelling at another site and been moved to the place it was found. Or it might also have come from an earlier house at that site or a residence built at the site after the Smiths moved to New York. No available information verifies whether it was resting, when found, upon the original foundation upon which it had been placed. This necessary in-

¹B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church* (Salt Lake City, 1930), Vol. 6, p. 427.

²Sermon of Junius F. Wells in Twentieth Ward, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1911.

formation needs to be carefully pursued. If there is merit in locating and designating and memorializing sites connected with our history, there is also need to verify them as authentic sites as far as possible. The New England or New York sites need to be subjected to archaeological scrutiny.

THE SACRED GROVE, MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP, NEW YORK

When the youthful Joseph Smith was spiritually aroused by the religious fervor which led some of the members of his family to become seekers themselves in the Presbyterian Church at Palmyra Township, New York, the Smiths were residing on their farm some three miles from the Palmyra town. The farmland they had purchased was mostly covered with native forests. To clear the land for agricultural use, they were forced to cut down many trees. Some of the trees were used for fences, others to build their log house and out-buildings, some for firewood. Many loads of cordwood were hauled to Palmyra and sold for fuel.³ In those years before coal, oil, or gas were available for fuel in rural areas, each farmer sought to provide wood for cooking and heating. Usually there was a part of each farm which was never completely cleared of trees. This was known as the "woodlot." By careful management the woodlot could provide the needed fuel, if only the mature or "ripe" trees were harvested from the "tree farm." Hearth heating and cooking were very inefficient, and required a great amount of fuel. For that reason the woodlots were often several acres in extent.

Whether the present acreage included in the Sacred Grove is the survival of the Smith woodlot has never been determined. There are records of such lots which, during the course of a century or more, "migrated" (and shifted) up to a quarter of a mile. This was the result of mature trees being cut and seedlings growing up nearby, seeded by the older trees, or planted by the owner. Sometimes a family decided to make the woodlot also serve as a windbreak, and in such cases it was brought closer to the house and barns, where it grew for years while the former lot was used to supply fuel, and when all was harvested the former woodlot was converted to tillable land. After state forestry departments and the United States

³George W. Cowles, *Landmarks of Wayne County* (Syracuse, 1895), p. 78.

Department of Agriculture commenced providing seedlings for windbreaks and woodlots at ridiculously low prices, such tree farms were continuously being moved, as it was found more advantageous to plant solid plots rather than depend on nature to seed the lot, which usually produced a haphazard growth of trees and left much land unproductive.

The present Sacred Grove has in it a few very large and hence old trees, and others ranging down to last year's seedlings. If this is the survival of a natural unplanted and unplanned family woodlot, it could possibly be the survival of part of the old wooded area into which the youthful Joseph went to pray. Or, it might be that he went to some other part of their more than a hundred acre farm, since much of it was still forest. An old resident of the vicinity stated many years ago that the present Sacred Grove was not there a hundred years ago, but that it was west and a little south of the present wooded area. Another conflicting account relates that when George Ed. Anderson of Springville, Utah, was making photographs in the Sacred Grove in 1907, he conversed with Mr. Chapman, the non-Mormon caretaker employed by the Church. He related that shortly before his father's death the elder Mr. Chapman (who owned the land) told him he had never used an axe in the grove except to remove dead timber. He urged his son who inherited the property to respect the wooded area in similar fashion. This message from father to son conveyed the belief that this was the very forest in which Joseph Smith had prayed and experienced the grand theophany which was the origin of the Mormon religion. The son followed his father's policy and allowed it to develop as a sylvan grove.⁴ It has been stated that the two largest trees in the grove have had cores cut from them which have been examined by experts, who counted the annual rings and reported the trees could have been saplings a hundred and fifty years ago. Other tree experts have questioned if the trees could be more than a century old.

For those interested in research concerning this matter, an examination of county or township records or mortgages, sales of property, leases, inventories of estates, local newspaper accounts, letters, diaries, and memoirs of those who owned or

⁴"Boy in the Picture of the Sacred Grove," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 23 (May, 1920), pp. 639-640.

leased property on this or neighboring farms between 1831 and 1907 might be helpful. Historic-site archaeologists could tell, through tracing former roadways, tree growth and decay, removal of stumps, etc., whether the land has been continuously forested, or the present stand is a result of a replant on what was once tilled ground.

THE JOSEPH SMITH, SR., HOUSE AT MANCHESTER

Many years before the Church purchased the Smith "homestead" in 1907, the entire community designated the white frame house presently standing on the Smith farm in Manchester Township as the Smith residence. Such identification is not sufficiently reliable to be accepted as fact without further verification. Lucy Mack Smith's history relates that while they were yet residing in Palmyra they had erected a "snug log-house" on their farm southwest of town.⁵ Several contemporary writers confirm her story, indicating it had two rooms on the ground level, and a garret (or half story) above which likewise was divided into two rooms.⁶ Before the birth of their last child, Lucy, in 1821, an additional bedroom was added on the ground level, constructed of wooden slabs. By modern standards they were obviously crowded, the family then consisting of the parents and nine children. Alvin, the eldest son, decided to build a frame dwelling for his parents and worked away from home to secure means to make the annual payments on the land and get lumber for the proposed new home. Mother Smith, according to what she related to Howard and Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, who did the actual writing of her history, stated that the construction of the new house commenced in November 1822. Her account reads:

And when November 1822 arrived, the frame was raised, and all the materials necessary for the speedy completion were procured. This opened to Alvin's mind the pleasing prospect of seeing his father and mother once more comfortable and happy.⁷

⁵Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of the Prophet Joseph Smith and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, 1853), p. 71.

⁶Pomroy Tucker, *Origin and Progress of Mormonism* (New York, 1867), p. 13; See also *History of Wayne County* (Philadelphia, 1877), pp. 149-150.

⁷Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 86-87.

Immediately following this statement, Mother Smith related that Alvin was taken suddenly ill on November 15, 1824, and died on the 19th, following a short and painful illness. Investigation into this account shows that Mother Smith was in error concerning the dates of both events. It appears that the commencement of the house and Alvin's death followed one another in the late autumn of 1823.⁸ It is on the basis of the investigations of these related events that Andrew Jenson, B. H. Roberts, and Joseph Fielding Smith came to the conclusion that the visitation of Moroni to Joseph Smith after he had retired to his bed on the night of September 21, 1823, took place in one of the garret rooms of the log house, rather than the frame house on which construction had not yet commenced.⁹

The statement, ". . . the frame was raised . . ." is a technical builder's term and refers to the method of wooden house construction then in vogue. Heavy hardwood timbers were laid on stone or brick foundations. Sturdy upright corner posts were then mortised into the wooden sills and crossbeams laid atop the uprights to support the second floor. The process was repeated and then the crossbeams were laid to form the ceiling of the second floor and give support to the roof rafters. All of these were held together by mortise and tenon or dovetail joints inserted in each other. These were then pegged together by oak or hickory pins driven into holes bored with augers through the joining members. Wooden pins thus driven had been dry-heated, and when in place, would then expand by absorbing moisture from the atmosphere and make an extremely tight and durable joint. Such pins had the advantage over iron bolts in that they would not rust and weaken the locked joints as metal tended to do in damp climates. After this frame had been locked together, the studs for the exterior

⁸See notice in *Wayne Sentinel*, Sept. 25, 1824, by Joseph Smith, Sr., reporting the opening of Alvin's grave. The date on the tombstone also verifies the date as 1823; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City, 19....), pp. 39-40.

⁹Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 39; Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, Vol. 6, p. 427; Andrew Jenson, *Andrew Jenson's Scrapbook*, p. 357; *Deseret News*, Oct. 5, 1935, p. 1; Preston Nibley, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City, 1944), p. 36, is not so certain, however, thinking that the visitation of Moroni occurred in the unfinished frame house into which they had moved from the log house. This he bases on Mother Smith's mistaken date of November 1822 as the date of raising the frame.

walls and interior partitions were mortised top and bottom into the sills and cross-members to form the nailing studs for attaching exterior siding and interior lath.¹⁰ This is in direct contrast to present building practices, in which the exterior studding supports the house, without the use of framed timbers as the skeleton of the house. It was this framework, without the clapboard enclosure or interior partitions, to which Mother Smith referred, and which apparently stood through the winter of 1823-1824, after which construction on the new house was continued. According to local witnesses previously cited, the Smiths moved into the new house before it was completely finished.

Individuals who lived in Palmyra during the Smiths' residence at Manchester refer to their new house as a "small frame house."¹¹ This hardly fits the present house, which is a comparatively large farmhouse of two stories. A house of this size would have been a venturesome undertaking for the Smith family which had experienced difficulty making the annual payments on the land and finally lost the farm shortly after completing the house through failure to make the final payment.¹² Before it can be ascertained that this present house, or only part of it, or possibly none of it, was the house the Smiths constructed, much research needs to be done.

The present house now standing on the Smith farm has recently been renovated and refurnished and is visited by thousands of people annually. Historic architects need to be consulted so they can determine what might be new, and what might be original in the house. They possess many skills of their trade which reveal with certainty the age of buildings and their additions. Old-fashioned square nails are not a positive clue as they are still being manufactured. The methods of manufacture have changed slowly and within bounds they provide some measureable information. Cut wire nails are still more positive in their dating to a given year or two as these did not come into common use until the eighteen-nineties. The composition of plaster, the texture and manufacturing methods of brick, and the use of Portland cement products can likewise

¹⁰See Frederick J. Kelly, *Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut* (New York, 1963), for descriptive drawings of eighteenth and nineteenth century frame building construction.

¹¹See footnote six above.

¹²Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 70, 71, 94-98.

be used with a high degree of accuracy to establish dates of construction when studied by those trained in this type of analysis.

Another phase of study appears to have remained untouched concerning this house. Assessors' and tax collectors' records of the community covering the Smith occupancy of the Manchester house may indicate evidence which would help determine the accurate history of the house. They would reveal an increase in value when the new frame house was constructed and the old log house was turned into a barn. Followed through from 1820 to 1907 when the Church purchased the property, such records would indicate the years when an unusual increased valuation was levied because of a remodeling of, or additions were made to the house. Furthermore, estate papers or mortgage records might assist in establishing the changes which have taken place since 1823.

THE MARTIN HARRIS FARM, PALMYRA, NEW YORK

The present site of the Martin Harris farm north of Palmyra's main street has been authenticated. It was the farm Harris mortgaged to raise \$3,000 to pay the printing costs of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. In 1937 the Church purchased a home and an eighty-eight acre tract of land, about half the 1830 Harris farm. Though this was the land Martin Harris and his wife lived on, the present home was not theirs. This stone structure was built about 1850 after the original Harris frame home had burned to the ground.¹³

THE PETER WHITMER, SR., FARM, RURAL WATERLOO, NEW YORK

Deed records leave no question concerning the identity and location of the Whitmer farm. But the exact location of the original house is less certain. Church members who visited the site in the eighteen-eighties and nineties indicated the present building was then standing but were informed that it had not been there when the Whitmers sold the farm in 1831. They pointed to some old logs (some say they were south and west

¹³Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity* (Palmyra, 1930), pp. 206-207. See also "Martin Harris and the Restored Church," a Cumorah Mission tract offered at the site.

of the present residence) which they said were the remnants of the Peter Whitmer, Sr., dwelling. This would place the Whitmer residence west of the road which leads from the county lane to the present white farmhouse with its stubby pillars.¹⁴ The New York State Historical Society's marker stresses this is the *farm*, not the *house* of the Whitmer family.

Here again the work of a historic-sites archaeologist, a historical architect, and a research historian could ascertain the age of the present house and locate the site of the former log structure inhabited by the Whitmers prior to 1831. The date of the building of the present white farmhouse could be ascertained from county deeds, estate papers, mortgage records, assessors' and tax collectors' accounts, as well as contemporary newspapers, diaries, etc. A rather definitive article by Carter E. Grant, "The Whereabouts of the Whitmer Log House" appeared in *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 65 (1962), pp. 250, 281-283. Guides assigned to that location can depend on the article with confidence.

CONCLUSION

The farm sites have been authenticated;—it is the building and artifacts that need closer attention. But why should Latter-day Saints concern themselves with authentic history? What difference does it make to the tourist if he is told fact or fiction? Personally, I do not appreciate being victimized by someone who while posing as an authority disseminates error, however trivial it may seem. The Church has entered the historic-site field out of a genuine love for its past history, to establish visible monuments in honor of the people who, under God's guidance, enacted its history. Locations where important ecclesiastical events took place and authentic artifacts of the time give lasting testimony of these people. Once having embarked in this field, it appears that the Latter-day Saints must insist that we teach and present only what is in keeping with the highest standards of historical confirmation. Cooperstown, New York, is a carefully restored community which like other authentic restoration projects is not far from Palmyra. Our presentations are certain to be compared to theirs. We should

¹⁴See statement of Andrew Jenson, Ezra Stevenson, and Joseph S. Black in *Deseret News*, Oct. 2, 1888.

be certain that the interpretation we offer at our New York and Vermont sites is as accurate as research can make it. If we do not do this, our unreliable presentation will reflect on the integrity of the Church. It is argued by some that only one person in a hundred can (or even cares to) detect a misleading or distorted account. Perhaps so. But it is that very one percent who write books and magazine articles, and spread an unfavorable reputation farther than the misinformed ninety-nine percent ever can.

Perhaps we should amend the Colonial Williamsburg Guideline to read:

“LDS faith needs roots in authentic stone and mortar that the present and the future may learn from the past.”

The Shaping of the Mormon Mind in New England and New York

Marvin S. Hill*

Recent students of Mormonism have tended to discount or dismiss the influence of the Church's sojourn in New England and western New York on the development of Mormon thought. Within the last decade two scholars have placed major emphasis on what occurred in Kirtland or afterward as determinative in molding the Mormon mind.¹ One of them summarized that "almost all of Mormonism developed after 1830 in the midwest: its economics, theology, and social arrangements."² It is my contention that during its "eastern"³ phase Mormonism assumed its essential orientation in ideas and institutions. The eastern interval was, in other words, formulative, and any student who loses sight of this fact ignores the continuity which clearly exists in early Mormon thought.

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¹See R. Kent Fielding, "The Growth of the Mormon Church in Kirtland, Ohio" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, Indiana University, 1957), pp. 134-152. Fielding suggested that there was a "new direction of doctrine" in Ohio, but he did not make the point as emphatically as does Mario S. DePillis in "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 1 (March, 1966), pp. 68-88.

²This was DePillis' reiteration of his previous viewpoint. See "Social Sources of Mormonism," *Church History*, Vol. 37 (March, 1968), p. 60.

³I do not wish at this time to examine the ramifications of DePillis' quarrel with Whitney R. Cross on the applicability of Turner's frontier thesis to the rise of Mormonism. My purpose is to counter Fielding's and DePillis' argument that what was most characteristically Mormon emerged only after they left western New York. For consideration of the DePillis-Cross disagreement see DePillis, *Church History*, Vol. 37, pp. 50-79, and Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District* (Ithaca, 1950), pp. 55-109, 138-150.

That early Mormonism had a "primitive gospel" orientation has long been recognized. This fact was first discerned by Alexander Campbell, who saw the emergence of Mormonism as a gross, satanic imitation of his restorationist movement.⁴ It was claimed by some Campbellites,⁵ and by some scholars,⁶ that the restorationist elements in Mormonism were introduced by the ex-Campbellite, Sidney Rigdon, who after quarreling with other restorationists, purloined the Book of Mormon from Solomon Spaulding and induced Joseph Smith to present it to the world as a divinely inspired work. Without adequate factual foundation,⁷ this interpretation is given little credence by most students.⁸ But the matter of the primitive gospel facets in Mormon thought must still be considered. Recently Mario DePillis has affirmed that all the primitivists including the Mormons were searching for an authoritarian church to assuage a disturbing insecurity engendered by nineteenth century sectarian conflict.⁹ While there may be some truth in this, DePillis has conceived primitivism too narrowly and has thus ignored many ramifications of Mormon thought. He has overlooked the fact that primitivism had eastern as well as western manifestations, and has thereby neglected the eastern roots of the Mormon mind. In truth, the primitivist movement was of national scope, spilling well beyond the limits of its institutionalization by the Disciples of Christ, including among its advocates those who formed other sects, and also many who became Mormons.

⁴Alexander Campbell, "The Book of Mormon Reviewed and Its Divine Pretensions Exposed," *Painesville Telegraph*, March 15, 1831, pp. 1-2.

⁵Campbell eventually discarded his theory of Joseph Smith's authorship of the Book of Mormon, which he advocated in the above work, and accepted the Rigdon-Spaulding theory. See *The Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 6 (December, 1856), p. 698. Compare Amos S. Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve* (Cincinnati, 1876), pp. 209-215.

⁶See William Alexander Linn, *The Story of the Mormons* (New York, 1963), pp. 64-65; and George Arbaugh, *Revelation in Mormonism* (Chicago, 1932), pp. 9, 12.

⁷I have examined the theory at length and demonstrated its weaknesses in my "Role of Christian Primitivism in the Origin and Development of the Mormon Kingdom, 1830-1844" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Chicago, 1968), pp. 92-97. Basically the thesis is untenable because none of the witnesses ever affirmed that there were two copies of the same manuscript, but E. D. Howe assumed that there were once he learned that the manuscript written by Solomon Spaulding had only a small resemblance to the Book of Mormon.

⁸George Arbaugh still holds to it. See his *Gods, Sex and Saints* (Urbana, 1957), p. 11.

⁹*Dialogue*, Vol. 1, pp. 68-88.

There was in the early nineteenth century a persistent tendency among sectarian-minded Americans to look back upon the early years of Christianity as formative for their institutions and to ignore the intervening years of Christian history.¹⁰ Thus the movement which greatly influenced the character of Mormon thought got underway between the end of the American Revolution and the beginning of the Jacksonian period—a time when the American churches reorganized on the basis of “persuasion” rather than “coercion,” and were alarmed by a developing rationalistic thought which they termed “infidel.”¹¹ The old-line churches launched a gigantic crusade against the infidel which took the form of organized revivals, preaching, prayers, and voluminous published propaganda.¹² But the campaign partly backfired, for many of the unchurched and some within the churches saw the crusade as menacing. Their “antimission” reaction helped to launch the primitive gospel movement on a nationwide scale.¹³

GOSPEL PRIMITIVISM WIDESPREAD

The primitive gospel movement emerged independently in New England, the South, and the West among a variety of groups. Usually each group was led by a layman or a man with limited clerical training who was influenced by a strong, anticlerical bias and who sought to break down any distinction between clergy and laity in the church.¹⁴ These groups took

¹⁰See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. 4: *The Great Century, A.D. 1800 - A.D. 1914* (New York, 1941), p. 428, and compare Sidney E. Mead, “Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America,” *Church History*, Vol. 23 (December, 1954), pp. 295-299.

¹¹See Sidney E. Mead, “From Coercion to Persuasion: Another Look at the Rise of Religious Liberty and the Emergence of Denominationalism,” *Church History*, Vol. 25 (December, 1956), pp. 317-337.

¹²See Charles Roy Keller, *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut* (New Haven, 1942), p. 220, and David Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York, 1939), pp. 40-53, and compare Cross, pp. 14-51.

¹³B. Cecil Lambert, “The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Doctrines, 1800-1840” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Humanities, University of Chicago, 1957), pp. 67-410. Two leaders of primitivism in New England were Abner Jones and Elias Smith. Lambert describes their efforts in detail, but see the *Memoir of Elder Abner Jones by His Son, A.D. Jones* (Boston, 1842), and *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels and Sufferings of Elias Smith* (Portsmouth, 1816).

¹⁴Alexander Campbell “utterly denied the ‘propriety of the distinction between clergy and laity.’ ” Campbell had not been formally ordained. See James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, 1962), pp. 72, 116.

flight from the existing old-line churches. They saw them as corrupt and apostate in nature and affirmed the necessity of a restoration of the primitive faith and order.¹⁵ Each group was stirred by the revivals which swept the nation during the Second Great Awakening yet reacted strongly against the sectarian conflict which developed in their wake, stressing the need for lasting Christian unity.¹⁶ They each manifested a cautious biblical authoritarianism¹⁷ and a tendency to reject the Calvinistic doctrine of election and affirm man's free will.¹⁸ In addition, they shared a decidedly millennialist perspective toward the unfolding events of the day.¹⁹

All of these attitudes were apparent in Mormonism before the exodus from New York. Actually, some of them were firmly lodged in the minds of the Smiths prior to their leaving New England and were carried into New York and nourished there until they became incorporated into the new gospel.²⁰ Lucy Mack Smith, the Prophet's mother, details in her history how she affiliated in New England with several religious groups, including the Presbyterians and Methodists,²¹ but

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 67-137.

¹⁶William Garrett West, *Burton W. Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* (Nashville, 1954), pp. 1-6, and Murch, pp. 109-121.

¹⁷For evidence of dependence which primitivists placed on Bible authority see Murch, *Christians Only*, pp. 45-47, 72, 87, 89, and I. Daniel Rupp (Comp.), *An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States* (Philadelphia, 1844), pp. 166, 251, 257, 264, 520-521, 731.

¹⁸See William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* (New York, 1952), pp. 193-198, 203-206, 216-233, and compare Rupp, *Original History*, above.

¹⁹For examples of millennialism among the Christian primitivists see Elias Smith, *Sermons Containing an Illustration of the Prophecies to Be Accomplished from the Present Time, Until the New Heavens and Earth Are Created, When All the Prophecies Will be Fulfilled* (Exeter, 1808), p. 87; also Elias Smith and Abner Jones, *Hymns Original and Selected for the Use of Christians* (Philadelphia, 1812), pp. 35, 49; James O'Kelly, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Designed for the Use of Christians* (Raleigh, N.C., 1816), p. 110, and p. 12 at the back of the book; Barton W. Stone, "Millennium," *The Christian Messenger*, Vol. 4 (June 1830), pp. 164-166; and the *Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 1 (1830), pp. 1-8, 53-58, 145-147, 311-313, 364-365, 373-375, 504-508.

²⁰DePillis ignores this fact, thereby giving undue emphasis to the influence of the "west" on the Mormons. He fails to explain why, if Mormonism was a "continuing quest for religious authority," as he says, the quest could not have begun in New England and been carried into New York. Thus it seems that his notions about Mormonism beginning in Ohio are contradicted by his argument that its primitivism began in New York. Compare his ambiguity in *Dialogue*, Vol. 1, p. 76, and in *Church History*, Vol. 37, pp. 55, 60, 62, 77-78.

²¹Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by his Mother* (Salt Lake City, 1954), pp. 35-36, 43, 48. This volume was edited with notes by Preston Nibley, and although a few parts of Lucy's original history have been altered, it is sufficiently faithful to the original for my purposes here.

found this experience frustrating and concluded that no existing church would give her life and salvation. While still in Vermont she decided that

there was not then upon the earth the religion which I sought. I therefore determined to examine my Bible, and taking Jesus and His disciples for my guide, I endeavored to obtain from God that which man could neither give nor take away.²²

Lucy indicates that her husband shared this primitivist outlook, and in 1811, after becoming excited on the subject of religion, he vowed that he would join no church but contend for "the ancient order, as established by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His Apostles."²³

Father Smith may have absorbed some of his anti-institutional ideas from his own father, Asael, who refused to join any of the churches during his lifetime because he could not reconcile their teachings with the scriptures.²⁴ He wrote to his children that they should give some thought to whether religion "consists in outward formalities, or in the hidden man of the heart"²⁵ and made it clear that he considered the latter choice preferable.

With such a background it was quite natural for young Joseph Smith to acquire a primitivist attitude. His mother relates that shortly after the death of her son, Alvin, 1823 or 1824,²⁶ a missionary preaching a form of primitive Christianity attempted to unite the churches of the area into "one mind and heart." She was attracted to the group and was inclined to join them, but Joseph Jr. said he would attend none of their meetings. "I can take my Bible," he said, "and go into the woods, and learn more in two hours, than you can learn at meeting in two years, if you should go all the time."²⁷ He insisted that the leader of the unity movement had no genuine sympathy for the poor in his midst and that he would exploit them for his own profit.²⁸ Thus Joseph had already developed a deep concern for the social well-being of the poor, and this

²²*Ibid.*, p. 36.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 46

²⁴Mary Audentia Anderson, *Ancestry and Posterity of Joseph Smith and Emma Hale* (Independence, Mo., 1929), p. 60.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

²⁶There is some disagreement as to the exact year of Alvin's death.

²⁷L. M. Smith, p. 90.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

may have discouraged his joining the main stream of the primitive gospel movement.

Not only had the Smith family acquired their primitivist outlook in the East, but so also had many of the earliest converts to the faith. Among those who were primitivists before coming into contact with Mormonism were Newell and Joseph Knight, Orson Pratt, Lorenzo Dow Young and others in the Young family, Wilford Woodruff, and Laban Morrill.

Newell Knight, youthful friend of Joseph Smith in Chenango County, New York, was convinced as a young man that there had been an apostasy from the true church and that a restoration was needed. His father, Joseph Knight, also a convert to Mormonism, had been a "universalist" in doctrine but had refused to join any "religious sect."²⁹ Orson Pratt, reared in New York, was taught by his father to "venerate . . . Jesus Christ, and His Prophets and Apostles, as well as the scriptures written by them," but was told to use caution in accepting any denomination in the "so-called Christian world." His father denounced the "hireling clergy" and would join no church. Orson also refused to unite with any denomination until he became a Mormon, being converted only after his brother Parley, once a Campbellite preacher, brought news of the new dispensation given to Joseph Smith.³⁰

Most of the Young family, including Brigham and Phineas, had been Reformed Methodists and were taught baptism by immersion and the principle of faith healing in that splinter denomination.³¹ Phineas indicated that he practiced the laying on of hands prior to becoming a Mormon.³² Another brother, Lorenzo Dow, however, refused to join any church, "not believing that any of the sects walked up to the precepts contained in the Bible."³³

²⁹Part of Newell Knight's Journal appears in *Scraps of Biography, Tenth Book of the Faith Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City, 1883), pp. 47-48.

³⁰Parley P. Pratt (ed.). *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (5th ed.; Salt Lake City, 1961), pp. 19, 43.

³¹See Phineas Young's account in "The History of Brigham Young," *The Millennial Star*, Vol. 25 (May, 1863), p. 327, and compare Reverend Wesley Bailey's sketch of the primitivist beliefs of the Reformed Methodists in Rupp, *Original History*, pp. 466-474.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 327.

³³*Millennial Star*, Vol. 25 (June 27, 1863), pp. 406-407, and "Lorenzo Dow Young's Narrative," *Sixth Book of the Faith Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City, 1882), pp. 31-33.

Wilford Woodruff, converted in Rhode Island in 1833, had not previously belonged to any church because he "could not find any denomination whose doctrines, faith and practice agreed with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or the ordinances and gifts which the Apostles taught." As a young man he had been greatly influenced by Robert Mason, "the old prophet," who preached that there must be a restoration of primitive Christianity.³⁴

Laban Morrill, who was converted in 1833 in Vermont and later went to Utah, had been a typical primitive seeker. He wrote in his autobiography that his allegiance had been

sought after by different religious sects; but I felt that there was a great opposition among the different religions of the day, and the members and advocates of each claiming their own as the true church. I felt that if one of the many sects was right; the others must all be wrong; for I believed that there should be but one faith and one baptism and one Lord.³⁵

It was, as DePillis has argued, the antisectarian ideals of the Mormons which attracted them to a movement which advocated one true, authoritative church.³⁶ But there had developed among them other primitivist attitudes which exerted much influence in shaping their outlook. There is evidence that prior to leaving New York the Mormons had consolidated their primitivist views into a fairly consistent pattern. They were, like others with their predisposition, rigorous biblicists, hostile toward revivals and missionary societies, and ardent advocates of religious unity. They lamented the spread of infidelity, or "natural religion," believing that its proliferation would undermine Christian faith. They were already firmly

³⁴*Millennial Star*, Vol. 27 (March 25, 1865), p. 182, and Wilford Woodruff, "Leaves from My Journal," *Third Book of the Faith Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City, 1881), pp. 1-3.

³⁵"Life of Laban Morrill, Written by His Grandson, with Quotations from His Autobiography," pp. 90-91. A typewritten copy of this journal, dated 1946, is in the Brigham Young University library. Others who joined the Church in the East soon after its organization and held primitive gospel beliefs were Daniel Tyler, Joseph Holbrook, Amasa M. Lyman, and Heber C. Kimball. See Tyler's "Incidence of Experience," *Tenth Book of the Faith Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City, 1883), pp. 22-23; "Life of Joseph Holbrook, 1806-1871," typewritten manuscript, Brigham Young University library, 1942, pp. 11-12, 18-20, 25; Albert R. Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman, Vol. I of the History of the Amasa Mason Lyman Family* (Delta, Ut., 1957), pp. 11, 13-14; and Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City, 1888), pp. 18-20, 30-34.

³⁶DePillis, *Dialogue*, Vol. 1, pp. 68-88.

committed to a lay priesthood and had discarded Calvinistic election for the principal of man's free will and individual merit. They had become firmly committed to the ideal of continuing revelation, not conceiving it as did other primitivists as a gradual unfolding of hidden Bible truths but as additional word of God made known to their prophet. Via this means their theology and church organization were well launched before 1831. Like other primitivists, they were dedicated millennialists, but they made more of the doctrine than most, announcing the principle of the gathering and the building of the New Jerusalem somewhere in the great West.

CONCEPT OF A KINGDOM

In addition, there is evidence that in New York they were already committed to the idea of an earthly political kingdom where the Saints would reign, and prior to their departure they planned to establish a communitarian experiment which would sustain the kingdom of God economically.³⁷ Early in the New York period they were convinced that they were a chosen people, that it was their calling to preach salvation to a perverse generation who must accept their gospel message or suffer impending destruction. As one would expect, non-Mormons did not take kindly to the idea that they were prophetic Babylon and doomed, and that the new revelation would force them to set their own gospel views aside. Their reaction brought verbal abuse and eventual persecution which only made the saints more secretive and more exclusive in their relations with their neighbors. Thus, but few of the basic attitudes or institutions which set the saints apart from the Gentiles in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois were lacking in 1831. What came afterward were variations on some well-established themes.

The Mormon allegiance to the Bible was affirmed in the Book of Mormon where Nephi was told that when the Hebrew scripture

³⁷DePillis erroneously concludes that communitarianism "entered the as yet inchoate religion as a result of Campbellite and Shaker influences Smith encountered when he fled westward to Kirtland." *Church History*, Vol. 37, p. 60. In fact, Joseph Smith did not have to leave New York to encounter Shaker and other communitarian influence. The Groveland Society of Shakers was located at Sodus, and a Jemima Wilkinson experiment was found at PennYon, both within thirty miles of Manchester.

proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the plainness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they bear record according to the truth which is the Lamb of God.³⁸

But, like Alexander Campbell, the Mormons held that some of the truths of the gospel had been lost through erroneous translation. The Book of Mormon declared that when the Bible passed through the hands of "the great and abominable church" many "plain and precious things" were lost.³⁹ In 1832 the Reverend B. Pixley, a Baptist minister who observed the Mormons closely in Missouri, noted that in their estimation

The Gospels . . . are so mutilated and altered as to convey little of the instruction which they should convey. Hence we are told a new revelation is to be sought—is to be expected, indeed is coming forthwith.⁴⁰

So Nephi wrote in the Book of Mormon that when the American scripture would be revealed it would make known the "plain and precious things which have been taken away" from the Bible.⁴¹ Thus the Latter-day Saints saw their new revelation as support for the ancient faith and considered that any innovations would but constitute a restoration of what had been lost. B. Pixley thought he sensed some incongruity in this position when he commented that "our present Bible is to be altered and restored to its primitive purity."⁴²

When the elders first came to Ohio, John Corrill noticed that they placed extra stress on the Old Testament. He said that the Saints

believe as firmly in the Scriptures of the Old Testament as any other people. They look upon their new revelations as bringing about the fulfillment of the Bible.⁴³

It was this heavy dependence upon the Old Testament, and the belief that through modern revelation "all things" must be restored before the coming of the millennium, which would provide the Mormons with scriptural justification when they

³⁸1 Nephi 13:24.

³⁹*Ibid.*, vs. 26.

⁴⁰Quoted in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, *Among the Mormons* (New York, 1958), p. 74.

⁴¹1 Nephi 13:40.

⁴²Mulder and Mortensen, *Among the Mormons*, p. 74.

⁴³John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Including Their Doctrine and Discipline* (St. Louis, 1839), p. 14.

began the practice of plural marriage in Ohio.⁴⁴ But in New York, before polygamy was introduced, the non-Mormons already feared the implications of extra-biblical revelation, and bitter opposition arose.⁴⁵ The effect upon the Mormons was to promote a closer cohesiveness among them.⁴⁶

There can be little doubt that a strong antirevivalism and antimissionism which prevailed among the Saints developed in western New York where the Burned-over District was singled with the exhortations of missionaries for a wide variety of causes.⁴⁷ W. W. Phelps, an ex-anti-Mason who had left New York to join the Saints, commented in *The Evening and Morning Star* that

As to so many appendaged societies to the gospel, we must say, that neither the Savior, nor his apostles, nor the Scriptures, have taught any thing more necessary, than to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus, . . . Camp-meetings and protracted meetings, like the wind that blows before a storm, seem to increase, as the judgments of the Almighty are sent forth to purify the world.⁴⁸

Reverend Pixley had noted the Saints "would have no fellowship for temperance societies, Bible societies, tract societies, or

⁴⁴The Saints quoted Acts 3:19-21 to the effect that there must be a restitution of all things, including polygamy, prior to the second coming of Christ. John Benson, among others, made this point in his letter of February 17, 1844, located in the "Richards Family Correspondence" at Southern Illinois University. Compare *Evening and Morning Star*, Vol. 2 (February, 1834), p. 265, and the *Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1 (May, 1835), p. 117. That the practice began in Ohio, and not Illinois, is evidenced by the testimony of Benjamin F. Johnson, Benjamin Winchester, and John Whitmer. See "An Interesting Letter from Patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson to Elder George S. Gibbs" in a typewritten manuscript at the Brigham Young University library, and compare Charles L. Woodward, "The First Half Century of Mormonism," p. 195. This is an unpublished collection of material, including Winchester's reminiscences, located in the New York Public Library. See also "Book of John Whitmer," p. 40, a typed manuscript in the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.

⁴⁵L. M. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, pp. 105, 108-109, 143-145, 156, 176, 179-180; also Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1948), Vol. 1, p. 88, (cited hereafter as DHC) and compare *The Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, Vol. 2 (April, 1831). Robert Baird, nineteenth century champion of evangelical Christianity, defined the orthodoxed as those "whose religion is the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing *but* the Bible." He categorized the Mormons among the "unevangelicals" due to their extra-biblical revelation. See Robert Baird, *Religion in America* (New York, 1845), p. 288.

⁴⁶See *A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ* (Zion, 1833), p. 61. Here in New York, as a result of this persecution, the members were commanded to gather together into closer proximity.

⁴⁷See Cross, *Burned-over District*, pp. 3-51.

⁴⁸"Signs of the Times," *The Evening and Morning Star*, Vol. 1 (October, 1832), p.[6].

Sunday School societies,"⁴⁹ while Oliver Cowdery, a New York convert, later remarked:

In vain will the Gentiles of this generation attempt to reform themselves, or others, or to obtain what they have lost . . . certain the present Gentile world, with all its parties, sects, denominations, reformations, revivals of religion, societies, and associations, are devoted to destruction. . . .⁵⁰

The Saints disparaged the revivals because of the sectarian bitterness and hostility which seemed to come in their wake. William Smith, the Prophet's brother, related how the 1820 revival had sharply divided the community and left the convert in a state of confusion.⁵¹ But Mormon rejection of revivalism put them out of step with the dominant evangelical Protestants who considered support for revivalism and the missionary societies as fundamental among all true Christians.⁵²

Like other primitivists, the Mormons desired unity. The Lord told them in New York to "be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine."⁵³ This quest for religious unity was central to Mormonism, as I have demonstrated elsewhere.⁵⁵ But where the Campbellites initially had some hopes for interdenominational unification,⁵⁶ the Saints condemned the other churches and sought unity within. The resulting effects upon the Mormon mind were profound and reached far beyond the borders of western New York.⁵⁷

⁴⁹Mulder and Mortensen, *Among the Mormons*, p. 74.

⁵⁰*Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1 (December, 1834), p. 39. Cowdery was the editor of the *Advocate*. Robert Baird saw the missionary, tract, and other reform societies as evidence of the great worth of the "voluntary principle," the separation of church and state in the United States. See Baird, *Religion in America*, pp. 166-173.

⁵¹*William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, Iowa, 1883), p. 7, and compare William Smith's statement to E. C. Briggs, *Deseret Evening News*, January 20, 1894, p. 11.

⁵²Robert Baird praised revivalism, observing that "it cannot be disputed that our truly zealous, intelligent and devoted Christians, whatever be their denomination, not only believe in the reality of revivals, but consider that, when wisely promoted, they are the greatest and most desirable blessings that can be bestowed upon the churches." He included among those who opposed them "the openly wicked and profane," and those like the Roman Catholics and Unitarians "whose Christianity is greatly marred with errors and heresies." See Baird, *Religions in America*, p. 214.

⁵³*Book of Commandments*, pp. 82-83. Compare also 2 Nephi 3:12.

⁵⁴Cancelled.

⁵⁵Hill, "Christian Primitivism," pp. 122-301.

⁵⁶West, *Barton W. Stone*, pp. 110-131.

⁵⁷Hill, "Christian Primitivism," pp. 122-163, 172-176, 180, 184-301.

As with the other primitivists, fear of infidelity weighed heavily upon Mormon thoughts. The Book of Mormon repeated the warning continuously that a nation that denied the faith and would not honor and serve the Lord was doomed to destruction.⁵⁸ The Lord affirmed in an early revelation that the ancient American scripture was intended to prove to the world "that the holy scriptures are true; and also, that God doth inspire men and call them to his holy work, in these last days as well as in days of old."⁵⁹

In three early issues of *The Evening and Morning Star*, W. W. Phelps discoursed on the inadequacies of "natural religion." His avowed intention was to

prove that revealed religion hath advantages infinitely superior to natural religion; that the greatest geniuses are incapable of discovering by their own reason all the truths necessary to salvation. . . .⁶⁰

Phelps lamented: "Under pretense that natural science hath made greater progress, revelation is despised,"⁶¹ and argued at length that under the aegis of revealed religion it would be easier to account for such sticky philosophical problems as the source of misfortune and evil in the world.⁶² It may well be that in formulating an hostile attitude toward eighteenth century rationalist thought, the early Mormons prepared the way for some of the conflict between reason and revelation which, according to O'Dea, troubles the Church in the twentieth century.⁶³

The Mormons were committed to a lay priesthood from the beginning of their movement.⁶⁴ While there is some lack

⁵⁸See, for example, 2 Nephi 17:30-43; Mosiah 26:3; Moroni 7:37-38 and 9:11-22; Helaman 16:15-23; and notice the example made of infidel, Korihor, in Alma 30.

⁵⁹*Book of Commandments*, p. 48. Compare Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1921), Sec. 21, vs. 11, which has been altered slightly.

⁶⁰See "Comparison Between Heathenism and Christianity," *The Evening and Morning Star*, Vol. 1 (September, 1832), p. [4].

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²See the issues from September through November, 1832. Compare also Lorenzo Dow Young's recollections of the jolting impact which his reading of Voltaire and Tom Paine had on his religious faith. Also notice his warning to youth to shun these works, in *Sixth Book of the Faith Promoting Series*, pp. 25-26.

⁶³Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago, 1957), pp. 222-257.

⁶⁴See Wesley P. Lloyd, "The Rise and Development of Lay Leadership in the Latter-day Saints Movement" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Divinity School, University of Chicago, 1937).

of evidence that all the ramifications of priesthood theory and organization had been worked out this early,⁶⁵ the principle of priesthood authority had been affirmed,⁶⁶ and a functioning organization was set up with Joseph Smith's right to preside as "prophet and seer" firmly established.⁶⁷ Lesser officers, including priests, teachers and elders, were also called to supervise the activities of the local branches.⁶⁸ Before the New York exodus it was revealed that the twelve apostles would be appointed to direct the missionary effort,⁶⁹ and it was made known that a bishop and others would be called to manage the Law of Consecration.⁷⁰ The distinctions between the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods which evolved in Kirtland, and the increasing sophistication of offices and functions which developed there did not alter the authoritarian nature of the organization nor its primitive gospel principle of lay leadership.

Just as the other restorationists participated in the "revolt against Calvinism," so the Mormon view of man was in a state of flux.⁷¹ The prophet Helaman lamented in the Book of Mormon

⁶⁵The question of the evolution of priesthood concept and organization in the early Church is a different one. I have discussed the pros and cons of Fielding's view that the Melchizedek priesthood was not conceived nor conferred until 1831 in "Role of Christian Primitivism," pp. 110-112. Compare Fielding, "Mormon Church in Kirtland," pp. 111-113.

⁶⁶Eber D. Howe mentions this claim by Oliver Cowdery when he first came to Ohio in *Painesville Telegraph*, November 16, 1830, p. 3. Cowdery proclaimed that until Smith's time the ordinances of the gospel "have not been regularly administered." Howe noted that many who had already been baptized by other denominations were "immersed into the new order of things," and noted in a later issue that Cowdery affirmed that only he and his associates were authorized to administer gospel ordinances. See December 7, 1830, p. 3.

⁶⁷*Book of Commandments*, pp. 37, 45-46, 51-54, 67-70, 83-84. Joseph's authority was completely established only after the incident with Hiram Page. See especially pp. 45-67.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 51-54.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

⁷¹DePillis comments in *Dialogue*, Vol. 1, p. 87, that "theologically, Joseph Smith's moral and physical departure from New England may be summed up in the second and tenth 'articles of faith,' which were not formulated until 1841. Article Two explicitly rejected the old Puritan maxim in 'Adam's fall we sinned all.'" But as I shall show, the Mormons rejected the Calvinistic conception of the total depravity of man with the publishing of the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, the New Englanders were rejecting it too, en masse, so that Joseph Smith hardly departed from them in this way. For evidence of this see Sweet, pp. 190-210. Also see Sidney E. Mead's biography of a key Congregationalist in New England, *Nathaniel William Taylor* (Chicago, 1942).

how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men. . . . O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth.⁷²

In accordance with this pessimistic view in the Mormon scripture, man's salvation must come through grace. Jacob admonishes his brethren to "reconcile yourselves to the will of God . . . and remember that after you are reconciled unto God that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved."⁷³

But despite this apparent Calvinistic conception of grace, the scripture indicates that man is capable of faith and repentance, and has within himself the will to believe.⁷⁴ As a result, man will be rewarded according to his works.⁷⁵ In a revelation which came soon after the Book of Mormon was translated, the Saints were informed that there was no such thing as endless punishment, that endless punishment was merely God's punishment, since endless is his name.⁷⁶ This is a position close to that of the Universalists who had long before rejected Calvinistic determinism.⁷⁷ Thus in 1830 the Mormon view of man and salvation was moving toward Arminianism.⁷⁸ This liberalization of Mormon thought was critical for the development of later doctrines such as man's potential divinity. Within two years after leaving New York the Prophet had

⁷²Helaman 12:4, 7.

⁷³2 Nephi 10:24.

⁷⁴Alma 32:27. Alma exhorts the unbelievers "if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even . . . exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you. . . ."

⁷⁵1 Nephi 15:33. The concept of the three degrees of glory was but a logical result of the belief in salvation by works, since as the Mormons argued, men obviously did not produce good works on any kind of equal basis. The revelation on the three degrees of glory, Section 76 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, came in February 1832, in Ohio, not in Illinois as DePillis seems to imply. See *Dialogue*, Vol. 1, p. 87, for some erroneous estimates as to when certain doctrines were taught.

⁷⁶*Book of Commandments*, p. 40. This revelation came in March 1830.

⁷⁷See "Argument Against the Doctrine of Endless Punishment," in Woodbury M. Fernald, *Universalism Against Partialism* (Boston, 1840), pp. 2-81, 199, 201. Notice also the argument of a Universalist missionary that if men are to be judged by their works they cannot receive a similar salvation in S. R. Smith, *Historical Sketches and Incidents, Illustrative of the Establishment and Progress of Universalism in the State of New York* (Buffalo, 1843), pp. 67-68.

⁷⁸I would thus agree with Thomas F. O'Dea that the general tone of the Book of Mormon is Arminian but believe he fails to note remnants of Calvinism that remain. See O'Dea, *The Mormons*, pp. 28-29, and compare Hill, "Christian Primitivism," pp. 103-104.

taken the next step by teaching that the essential intelligence in man was not created but was coexistent with God.⁷⁹

DePillis argues that Mormonism took form in the West since one hundred revelations in the *Doctrine and Covenants* came after 1830. But the Prophet did not leave New York until the end of January 1831⁸⁰ by which time forty of a total of one hundred thirty-three revelations had been received.⁸¹ Many of these were of basic importance in launching the new Church, including such topics as the coming forth of the Book of Mormon,⁸² the impending millennium, the gathering, the calling of the twelve apostles and other officers, church organization and government, requirements for church membership, missionary work, and the advisability of moving west to establish Zion.⁸³

The doctrine of the gathering, one of Mormonism's "most influential,"⁸⁴ was revealed in New York, while that of the kingdom of God had begun to take form. The Lord declared in October that "even so will I gather mine elect from the four quarters of the earth,"⁸⁵ and in January 1831 he said,

And this shall be my covenant with you, ye shall have it [a land flowing with milk and honey] for the land of your inheritance, and for the inheritance of your children forever, while the earth shall stand, and ye shall possess it again in eternity, no more to pass away:

⁷⁹*Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 93, vs. 29 (1921). This revelation came in May 1833. It may be that the changing view of man had some effect upon the Mormon doctrine of Deity which seems also to have been undergoing some alteration in the mid-1830's. See Hill, "Christian Primitivism," pp. 103-104, 153-155.

⁸⁰*DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 145.

⁸¹*Doctrine and Covenants* (1921).

⁸²DePillis in *Dialogue*, Vol. 1, pp. 78-80, underestimates the importance of the Book of Mormon to the early converts by ignoring the primitive gospel themes within it. See Hill, "Christian Primitivism," pp. 100-108, for exposition of these. Notice further how some of the most important leaders like Parley P. Pratt, Brigham Young and other members of his family, and Orson Spencer considered this scripture decisive in effecting their conversions. Parley Pratt said that the volume was "the principal means, in the hands of God, of directing the entire course of my future life." See Pratt, *Autobiography*, p. 37; "The History of Brigham Young," *Millennial Star*, Vol. 25 (June 6, 1863), pp. 360-361; *Journal of Discourses. Reports of Addresses by Brigham Young and Others* (Liverpool and London, 1856), Vol. 4, p. 77; and Orson Spencer, *Letters Exhibiting the Most Prominent Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1889), p. 11.

⁸³*Book of Commandments*, pp. 4-17, 19-39, 45-55, 60-68, 71-75, 80-84.

⁸⁴William Mulder, "Mormonism's 'Gathering': An American Doctrine with a Difference," *Church History*, Vol. 23 (September, 1954), pp. 248-264.

⁸⁵*Book of Commandments*, p. 73.

There the Saints would be governed by the law of the Lord:

But verily I say unto you, that in time ye shall have no king nor ruler, for I will be your King and watch over you.

Wherefore, hear my voice and follow me, and you shall be a free people, and ye shall have no laws but my laws, when I come, for I am your Lawgiver, and what can stay my hand.⁸⁶

At the same time the Lord made it known that he would establish consecration as the law of the kingdom.⁸⁷ It was not spelled out until they reached Ohio,⁸⁸ but the Saints were prepared with the warning that then "all these things shall be gathered unto the bosom of the church."⁸⁹ There is evidence which suggests that the law was actually introduced in New York, for those who were financially able were required at this time to share with the poor. A resident of Waterloo indicated that

two of the most responsible Mormonites . . . demurred to the divine command . . . requiring them to sell their property and put into the common fund. . . . A requisition of *twelve* hundred dollars, in cash, it is said was made upon these gentlemen . . . the Lord having need of it.⁹⁰

An editor of the *Lockport Balance* in Niagara County noted that the Saints who passed through on the way west had to convert their property to common stock.⁹¹

It may have been Sidney Rigdon, who had already quarreled with Alexander Campbell on the necessity of introducing a community of goods into the Campbellite church,⁹² who encouraged the Prophet to launch a similar experiment among the Mormons when he visited him in New York in December 1830. The first revelation on the subject did not come until

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

⁸⁷Joseph Smith told Martin Harris in February 1831, "we have received the laws of the kingdom since we came here." "The Journal History of the Church," (February 22, 1831), Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁸⁸*Book of Commandments*, pp. 89-96.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁰*Palmyra Reflector*, March 9, 1831, p. 116. Compare Leonard Arrington, "Early Mormon Communitarianism: The Law of Consecration and Stewardship," *Western Humanities Review*, Vol. 7 (Autumn, 1953), p. 349, n. 26.

⁹¹See *Philadelphia Album*, June 18, 1831, p. 198, which reproduces a piece from the *Lockport Balance*.

⁹²Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples*, pp. 208, 298-299. Compare also Mark F. McKiernan, "The Voice in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer 1793-1876," pp. 37-38. This unpublished manuscript is in the possession of J. Leonard Arrington and based upon McKiernan's Ph.D. dissertation finished at the University of Kansas.

January, after Rigdon and Smith had been together for a few weeks.⁹³ There is some chance Smith had previously heard of Rigdon's communitarian "family" from the missionaries he had sent to Ohio in late October.⁹⁴ But what evidence there is makes it unlikely that Rigdon had any decisive influence on the Prophet in this regard. Rather it is more likely that Rigdon had been more fully converted to Mormonism by a passage in the Book of Mormon which indicated that the Nephites, following Christ's American visit, introduced a sharing of property.⁹⁵ In Fourth Nephi it was recorded that they

had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.⁹⁶

That Rigdon did not simply convert Joseph Smith to his communitarian program is made clear by the fact that when the Prophet reached Ohio, Rigdon's "family" was broken up, and the Law of Consecration, which put more stress on individual initiative, was introduced.⁹⁷ It is interesting, and perhaps significant, that in Vermont prior to the Prophet's birth his uncle, Jason Mack, had "gathered together some thirty families on a tract of land which he had purchased for the purpose of assisting poor persons to the means of sustaining themselves." Jason planned a work program for this group and helped them to market what they produced.⁹⁸ Perhaps this enterprise had some religious significance, for Jason himself was a faith healer who practiced his art at least up to 1835.⁹⁹ Thus it is not inconceivable that Joseph Smith's interest in communitarianism

⁹³Hayden says that Rigdon went to New York about three weeks after his conversion, which came in late November. Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples*, p. 213.

⁹⁴None of the letters, if any, are now extant. It seems likely, however, as Leonard Arrington has reminded me, that men as literate as Parley P. Pratt and Oliver Cowdery would have reported back to Joseph Smith. Pratt indicates the time of his and the others' departure from New York. See his *Autobiography*, p. 47.

⁹⁵John Rigdon, Sidney's son, notes how carefully Rigdon studied the Book of Mormon before accepting it. Since communitarianism was a major issue for him at this time, he could hardly have overlooked 4 Nephi. See "Lecture Written by John M. Ridgon on the Early History of the Mormon Church," p. [7], typewritten manuscript at the Brigham Young University library.

⁹⁶4 Nephi vs. 3. See also vs. 25-26.

⁹⁷There are many resources one could cite, but see McKiernan, "Voice in the Wilderness," pp. 83-86.

⁹⁸L. M. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, pp. 40-41.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

may have started in New England. But it seems beyond question that it had emerged in New York before Rigdon's coming. Amos Hayden indicated such was the case, for he wrote that when the elders made their first converts in Ohio among the members of Rigdon's family they were preaching "new doctrines of having 'all things in common,' and of restoring miracles to the world." Hayden said that the seventeen members of the family, all baptized before Rigdon, greeted the doctrines with a "ready welcome."¹⁰⁰

According to Sidney Rigdon, while the Saints were still in New York meeting in a log house twenty feet square,

we began to talk about the kingdom of God as if we had the whole world at our command, we talked with great confidence, and talked big things . . . we talked about the people coming as doves to the windows, that all nations should flock into it; that they should come bending to the standard of Jesus. . . . When God sets up a system of salvation, he sets up a system of government . . . that shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs.¹⁰¹

Rigdon's recollections are given support by the fact that shortly after leaving New York Martin Harris warned that the Saints would soon have dominion over the earth.

Within four years there will not be one wicked person left in the United States; . . . the righteous will be gathered to Zion, . . . and there will be no President over these United States, after that time.

I do hereby assert and declare that in four years from the date thereof every sectarian and religious denomination in the United States will be broken down, and every Christian shall be gathered unto the Mormonites, and the rest of the human race shall perish.¹⁰²

Nancy Towles, who visited the Mormons in Ohio in September 1831, only a few months after they fled from the East, reported that they believed that they would "increase, and tread down all their enemies, and bruise them beneath their feet."¹⁰³ And Eber D. Howe noted that the Saints planned an

¹⁰⁰Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples*, p. 211.

¹⁰¹*The Prophet*, June 8, 1844, p. 2. This Mormon newspaper was published in New York City.

¹⁰²E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, 1834), p. 14.

¹⁰³Nancy Towles, "History of Mormonism," *Vicissitudes Illustrated* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1833), p. 153.

empire for themselves that would begin at Kirtland and reach all the way to the Pacific Ocean.¹⁰⁴

Before their departure the Mormons admonished the inhabitants of New York to beware of the impending judgments of God, and warned that only those who would gather to the promised land would be saved when the dreadful day of the Lord should come.¹⁰⁵ It was this sense of destiny, and the foreboding sense of impending disaster for the rest of the nation, that preoccupied much of the Mormon mind not only in these years but in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois.¹⁰⁶ But such pronouncements angered the non-Mormons who viewed the Saints as fanatics who warranted either their scorn or their abuse.¹⁰⁷ Long before they left the state they were forced to endure maltreatment, persecution, and some mobbing,¹⁰⁸ which only convinced them that indeed they were the chosen people suffering once more the barbs and malevolence of the wicked.¹⁰⁹

As the persecution mounted the Saints reacted by becoming more secretive and more exclusive. They began to hold secret meetings, and according to Rigdon, kept some of their boldest plans of the kingdom to themselves.¹¹⁰ Yet they felt that they must warn the people of the proximity of the Lord's coming and the judgments soon to fall on the wicked. Lucy Mack Smith reflected the forebodings of the Saints in a letter

¹⁰⁴Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, pp. 110, 145.

¹⁰⁵Sidney Rigdon was particularly active in this regard. See *Palmyra Reflector*, February 1, 1831, p. 95, and April 19, 1830, p. 130.

¹⁰⁶Hill, "Christian Primitivism," pp. 70, 74-76, 107-108, 120, 183, 226-227, 281, 299-300.

¹⁰⁷*Palmyra Reflector*, February 1, 1831, p. 95, and April 19, 1830, p. 130.

¹⁰⁸See the *Palmyra Reflector* between 1830 and February 1831 for many examples of bitter criticism. See also the *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, Vol. 2 (April 9, 1831), and *DHC*, Vol. 6, p. 393, for evidence of persecution.

¹⁰⁹See *DHC*, Vol. 1, pp. 9, 18, 43-44, 59, 84-94, 97-98.

¹¹⁰See Rigdon's recollections in *The Prophet*, June 8, 1844, p. 2, and notice Joseph Smith's comment that Oliver Cowdery gave the first *public* discourse in April 1830, *DHC*, Vol. 1, p. 81. Compare "The Book of John Whitmer," p. 6, where Whitmer indicates that unbelievers were excluded from the meetings. See the *Book of Commandments*, pp. 95, 110, where the mysteries were to be kept secret and the Saints were not to go in debt to the Gentiles unless commanded. Notice particularly that those who were guilty of robbery were to be delivered up to the law of God, not to the law of the land. See p. 102. In the 1835 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* the Saints were told that they were to honor the law of the land which is constitutional, which supports "that principle of freedom, in maintaining rights and privileges," but so far as the laws of men should go "whatsoever is more or less than these cometh of evil. I the Lord God maketh you free: therefore ye are free indeed." See pp. 216-217.

which she wrote in January to her brother, Solomon Mack, and his family. She warned that it would not be long before the Lord would "make His appearance on the earth with the hosts of heaven" and that he would then "take vengeance on the wicked and they that know not God." She said that a searching of the Old Testament prophecies had revealed that the Lord would again set his hand to recover his chosen people, and that the work had already commenced with the publishing of the Book of Mormon. This scripture had opened the eyes of the elect so that at last they might see the unfolding events in their true perspective. She now realized that

the eyes of the whole world are blinded; that the churches have all become corrupted, yea every church upon the face of the earth; that the Gospel is nowhere to be preached.

The reason for this apostasy among the churches is that their adherents

are all lifted up in the pride of their hearts and think more of adorning their fine sanctuaries than they do of the poor and needy. The priests are going about preaching for money, and teaching false doctrine and leading men down to destruction by crying peace, peace, when the Lord hath not spoken it.

Mother Smith urged her brother's family to ask themselves whether the "wisdom of men" is sufficient under the circumstances. Fortunately, the Lord had not left his children unto themselves but had reestablished his Church as in the days of the apostles, and many were being added to it daily. In ancient times it was promised that signs would follow those who believed, but such had not been so since then because none have taught the true doctrine of Christ. At last the Lord has made a new covenant with his Saints, and they that know him will gather in the West and await his coming.¹¹¹

It was these prophetic expectations which motivated the Saints to build their kingdom in the West and to shun the Gentiles, who were apostate "Babylon."¹¹² These primitive gospel ideals were acquired in New England, nurtured in

¹¹¹Lucy's letter, written at Waterloo, New York, January 6, 1831, was published in Ben E. Rich, *Scrapbook of Mormon Literature*, I (Chicago, n.d.), pp. 543-545.

¹¹²See Orson Pratt's use of the term to apply to the old-line churches, *Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1 (March, 1835), p. 89.

New York, and elaborated upon in Ohio and Illinois, and needed neither Campbellite nor frontier influences to make them definitive. When the missionaries met with instant success in Ohio and brought new members into the Church by the hundreds, it was not due to any doctrinal innovations but to the same primitive gospel message which they had been preaching in New York.¹¹³ The Mormon stress upon new revelation, miracles, and millennium attracted the Ohio novitiates, and their conversion was made sure by the fact that the new gospel seemed to be consistent with the Bible.¹¹⁴ To maintain that there was nothing characteristically Mormon in the message at this time is untenable. Even as late as 1838 the missionaries had not altered the message substantially,¹¹⁵ and when innovations did come at home the missionaries often avoided broadcasting them.¹¹⁶ Most of what DePillis considers

¹¹³See Fielding, "Mormon Church in Kirtland," p. 34, Corrill, *A Brief History*, pp. 8, 10, 14, and Lucy Mack Smith's letter cited in Rich, *Scrapbook of Mormon Literature*, p. 545. Lucy notes that within a few weeks in Ohio three hundred converts came into the Church. This sensational growth, continuing in 1830 and 1831, is acknowledged by E. D. Howe in the *Painesville Telegraph*, February 15, 1831, p. 3.

¹¹⁴See Corrill, *A Brief History*, pp. 8-14.

¹¹⁵Notice that the message taken to England in 1837 by Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde was a prophetic one, and it brought converts into the Church by the thousands. See Kimball's account of his work and his message, "President Heber C. Kimball's Journal," *Seventh Book of the Faith Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City, 1882), pp. 10, 12, 18-19, 21-23, 31-32, 34, 43-44. Many conversions and baptisms were almost immediate, hence there was no time to elaborate on doctrine. The earliest pamphlets by those opposed to Mormonism's spread in England criticized their claims to authority, the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith's reputation, and the Mormon war in Missouri, but not doctrinal mysteries. See Richard Livesey, *An Exposure of Mormonism, Being a Statement of Facts Relating to the Self-Styled "Latter Day Saints"* (Preston, England, 1838), and *The Imposture Unmasked; or a Complete Exposure of the Mormon Fraud*, 2nd ed. (Isle of Man, 1841). For an idea of how heavily the Mormons relied on primitivism at home as well as abroad see Pratt, *Autobiography*, pp. 81-82, 85, 89, 140-156, 168. As late as 1845 and 1846 there was still a strong primitive gospel emphasis in the missionary periodical, the *Millennial Star*. See Vol. 6, pp. 15, 30-36, 45-46, 62, 65-70, 105-106, 113-119, 140-142, 167-168, and Vol. 7, pp. 25-26, 60-61, 67-69. Much of Vol. 7 deals with the exodus from Nauvoo.

¹¹⁶Thus Sarah Scott, who later became a Strangite following Joseph Smith's death, told her parents frankly that since they lived in the East and not in Nauvoo they actually knew "little concerning the Church." Sarah insisted that despite what might be said the Mormons were teaching a plurality of Gods and of living wives. The elders, she indicated, were "positively instructed to deny these things." Hyrum Smith clearly stated the Church policy when he told the elders of China Creek that "an elder has no business to undertake to preach mysteries in any part of the world," and went on to inform them that they should "preach faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance and baptism for the remission of sins; the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost: teaching the necessity of strict obedience unto these principles; reasoning out the scriptures." Such doctrines as "the making of gods" and that "a man *having a certain priesthood*, may have

“the higher and more complex doctrines of Mormonism,”¹¹⁷ were either introduced prior to Nauvoo or else taught only to a comparative few.¹¹⁸ Only the doctrine of baptism for the dead was openly preached in England, a doctrine which could be defended by citing the New Testament.¹¹⁹ There is no evidence that these doctrinal innovations were indispensable to the rapid spread of Mormonism and they cannot be considered determinative of its early success.

as many wives as he pleases” were not to be taught, and anyone who did might lose his license. Compare Sarah Scott’s observations in Mulder and Mortensen, *Among the Mormons*, pp. 130, 143-144, and Hyrum Smith’s in the *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5 (March 15, 1844), p. 474. Notice also that Joseph Smith in his Wentworth letter made no mention of any new doctrines. Neither did Orson Pratt in his listing of Mormon principles. See the Wentworth Letter in *DHC*, Vol. 4, pp. 535-541, and O. Pratt, *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* (New York, 1841), pp. 5-32.

¹¹⁷*Dialogue*, Vol. 1, p. 87.

¹¹⁸The vision of the three degrees of glory came in Kirtland in February 1832, and the most significant ramifications of the kingdom of God had been worked out by 1838. The millennial emphasis began in New York, while the idea of many Gods was certainly developing by 1835. The concept of the “immortality of matter” was formed in Nauvoo by 1843, but the Mormon leaders had been reading Thomas Dick’s *Philosophy of a Future State* (Brookfield, Mass., 1830) which suggested such ideas in the middle 1830’s. Plural marriage was not taught to most of the Saints until 1846. On the early kingdom see Hill, “Christian Primitivism,” pp. 72-79, 184-227, and *Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 3 (November, 1836), p. 423 for evidence of Mormon awareness of Thomas Dick’s ideas. The “Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards,” San Francisco, 1880, p. 19, provides evidence that knowledge of polygamy was not widespread among the Saints until they fled from Illinois. This recollection by Mrs. Richards is in the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

¹¹⁹See “Baptism for the Dead,” *Millennial Star*, Vol. 3 (August, 1842), pp. 54-57.

Circumstantial Confirmation Of the First Vision Through Reminiscences

Richard Lloyd Anderson*

Historical sources, like the people who make them, are rarely either completely perfect or totally unreliable. The bread and butter work of the historian is less the divining of bias than a careful reading of his documents to determine just what is said, whether his source is in a position to know the information related, and to what extent each one tells a partial or complete story. Because it is claimed that Joseph Smith's account of the events surrounding his First Vision are not factual, the foregoing procedures must be applied to his own statements and to all other accounts that claim to relate first-hand information about his earliest activities.¹

Joseph Smith described "great multitudes" as joining various sects at the time of his First Vision, and a recent investigator concludes that the only authentic frame of reference for such an event is 1824-25, when the *Wayne Sentinel* in late 1824 observed, "a reformation is going on in this town to a great extent,"² and in early 1825 reported 400 converts to the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist Churches in the Palmyra area, with a progressive spread of this work "in the neighboring towns."³ Moving back in time, major revival

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¹This article could not have been written without the complete cooperation of several librarians, chief of which is the LDS Historian, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith and his assistants Earl Olson and A. William Lund. The following have also been most helpful: Thelma C. Jefferies at Rochester Public Library, Mrs. Clarence Nesbitt at King's Daughters Free Library (Palmyra), and Niagara County Historian, Clarence O. Lewis.

²*Wayne Sentinel*, September 15, 1824.

³*Ibid.*, March 2, 1825.

activity is not reported in Palmyra until the winter of 1816-17. Because of this gap during 1819 through 1823, it is asserted that Joseph Smith's story of an 1820 revival "*can not be true*,"⁴ for there is an "absence of any revival in the year 1820." Because of this conclusion and its implications, "all students of Mormon history will be forced to reconsider the reliability of Joseph's first vision story."⁵

JOSEPH SMITH

Before one can prove that Joseph Smith contradicts history, he must be sure of what Joseph Smith claimed. There are four official accounts of the First Vision from the Prophet. The three manuscript texts are printed in Dean Jessee's article in this issue. As he shows, their dates of composition are 1831-32, 1835, and 1838. This 1838 account was published as the "History of Joseph Smith" in 1842.⁶ The fourth account is Joseph Smith's "Wentworth Letter," also published in 1842.⁷ It is most convenient to refer to these accounts by their dates of composition.

A synoptic view of Joseph Smith's four accounts adds dimension to our view of his experience. First, revivals are not described in any other account but the 1838 history. Apparently the Prophet was not primarily concerned with them, for he did not constantly emphasize them as central to his personal experience. Second, all accounts identify his early religious position, like that of his father and mother before him, as that of a seeker, finding no church to satisfy him, but continually investigating various sects. Third, all accounts allude to contact with local church leaders or to his attendance at church meetings up to the time that his vision informed him that no church was divinely approved. He recalls: "my intimate acquaintance with those of different denominations" (1831-32); "looking at the different systems taught the children of men" (1835); "I attended their several meetings

⁴Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from Palmyra (N. Y.) Revival," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 10 (Fall 1967), p. 228.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶*Times and Seasons*, Vol 3, No. 10 (March 15, 1842), pp. 726 ff.

⁷*Ibid.*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (March 1, 1842), pp. 706 ff. It is now clear that the phrases of the Wentworth Letter originated at least as early as 1840, a point which requires development in later writing.

as often as occasion would permit" (1838); and "if I went to one society they referred me to one plan, and another to another" (1842). Even though the 1831-32 account expresses his negative evaluation of existing churches prior to the vision, all accounts suggest that in practice he participated to some extent in church meetings up to the time that his revelation confirmed this tentative judgment.

The most striking insight into the earliest religious experiences of the Prophet comes from the 1831-32 manuscript history. Whereas his shortest narrations (the 1835 account and the 1842 Wentworth Letter) summarily link an apparently brief religious confusion to the prayer and answer, the earliest record describes Joseph Smith's religious reflections as continuing from the age of twelve through fifteen. He remembers actively searching for the right church during these full years of 1818 through 1820. With this specific information in mind, the language of the 1838 history may imply a longer period of investigation than is generally supposed. He reflected again and again "in the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions," he attended occasional meetings when possible, and came to favor the Methodists only "in process of time." Since the 1838 history is very specific that the vision took place "early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty," the religious investigation just alluded to in this version must have extended back into 1819 or earlier. But a greater question of interpretation is seriously posed.

If years of religious activity are summarized in the short sentences of abbreviated accounts, did Joseph Smith's 1838 history really intend to portray all revival events as happening just before his vision? In that narrative the Prophet identifies the "unusual excitement" as beginning "in the second year after our removal to Manchester," but the outcome may move considerably beyond this sequence. Beginning in the Smith's area, revival spread through "that region of country," then to the "whole district of country." Even though Joseph alludes to himself as fifteen then, it is possible that "this time of great excitement" may refer to the entire period of revivals in his youth, with special reference to excesses, irrespective of chronology. When William Smith paraphrased his brother's words, his mental image was certainly not time or locality bound. The "unusual revival in the neighborhood . . . spread from

town to town, from city to city, from county to county, and from state to state.”⁸ In the April Conference of 1860, Brigham Young referred to having “been brought up in the midst of those flaming, fiery reformations from his childhood.”⁹ In that case the convert-president pictured years of New York revival patterns in the single “in the midst of” expression. There is no reason why Joseph Smith might not have viewed the intense 1824-25 Palmyra revivals as part of a period beginning earlier than his vision. All his 1838 narrative really demands is unusual religious activity in his region prior to 1820, and his own attendance at meetings and “desire to be united” with the Methodists. His only other circumstantial details that definitely require this approximate date are the religious awakening that “commenced with the Methodists” and the involvement of more than one preacher of that faith. “Some few days” after the vision, Joseph was shocked at the reaction of “one of the Methodist preachers” who had been prominent in the “religious excitement.”¹⁰

ORSAMUS TURNER

The main non-Mormon recollection of the Prophet’s earliest religious views corroborates what he describes. Most statements from Palmyra-Manchester people are more interested in proving his religious views ridiculous than factually describing his life at this time. They are consequently of limited historical value because they generally elevate community gossip into formal affidavits. Orsamus Turner is not exempt from this criticism, but he differs from practically all others who recalled the Smiths in that he distinguishes specifically between public report and personal knowledge.

Turner led a relatively short but distinguished life spanning the years 1801 to 1855. Born on the bare frontier of civilization in western New York, he had a log cabin childhood and grew with the country to become a respected editor

⁸William B. Smith, Sermon at Deloit, Iowa, June 8, 1884, *Saints’ Herald*, Vol. 31, No. 40 (October 4, 1884), p. 643.

⁹Brigham Young, Sermon at Salt Lake City, Utah, April 6, 1860, *Deseret News*, April 11, 1860.

¹⁰For a discussion of the Presbyterian affiliation of Joseph Smith’s family during this early period, see footnote 55 below. For the features of Joseph Smith’s description that particularly fit Methodist conference patterns, see footnote 27 below and the accompanying text.

and author.¹¹ In 1852 he published a sketch of Joseph Smith and Mormonism in his *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, in which he partially drew from his own experience. Because the time of Turner's residence in Palmyra is fairly pinpointed, his recollections of young Joseph Smith can be dated. He remembers their Manchester "rude log house, with but a small spot underbrushed around it," in "the winter of '19, '20." He recalls the Wayne County countryside because he had been assigned during his apprenticeship "in a newspaper office at Palmyra" to accompany a blind newspaper carrier "in the years 1818, '19."¹² This employment did not begin before October 1818, when the *Palmyra Register* was first issued by Timothy S. Strong, who moved from Palmyra in 1823.¹³ Strong's apprentices were Luther Tucker, Pomeroy Tucker, and "the author of this work." But young Turner did not serve his whole time in Palmyra, for he also notes that he served an apprenticeship under James Bemis at Canandaigua.¹⁴ Since he expressed a great admiration for Bemis based on intimate contact, he probably spent the years 1821 and 1822 at Canandaigua, where he "finished his apprenticeship."¹⁵

Turner later recounted that he heard of the need of a printer-editor at Lockport, about a hundred miles west of Palmyra, where he had evidently returned from Canandaigua for a brief period of school. He traveled to the new locality, arrived "but a few days after we had reached the age of 21 years" (about August 1, 1822), and purchased the new *Lockport Observatory*.¹⁶ Concerning the year 1822, Turner recalled,

¹¹The two most extensive biographies are Morley B. Turpin and W. De Witt Manning, "Orsamus Turner," *Rochester Historical Society Publications*, Vol. 17 (1939), pp. 273-290; Harry S. Douglass, *Historical Wyoming*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (January 1959), pp. 33-46.

¹²Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, 1852), pp. 213, 400.

¹³Strong suspended publication of his Palmyra newspaper in the spring of 1823 by existing issues. Turner recalls the date of his move away from Palmyra as 1823 (*Ibid.*, p. 499), which is verified in two other works: Arad Thomas, *Pioneer History of Orleans County, New York* (Albion, N.Y., 1871), pp. 111-112; Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer, New York State, 1785-1830*, 2nd ed. (Port Washington, N.Y., 1964), p. 302.

¹⁴Turner, *Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, pp. 499, 459.

¹⁵This phrase is from John Kelsey, who wrote his sketch while Turner was still alive, *The Lives and Reminiscences of the Pioneers of Rochester* (Rochester, 1854), p. 71.

¹⁶Orsamus Turner, "Then and Now—1822, 1854," *Niagara Democrat*, ca. May 4, 1854, cit. *Lockport Daily Courier*, May 5, 1854, copy furnished by

“the author . . . became the editor and publisher of the paper, in August, of that year.”¹⁷ In 1847 a fellow editor summed up his career in Lockport as continuous to that time: “[E]ither as publisher, editor, or assistant editor, [he] has continued at his post from 1822, to the present time.”¹⁸ Turner’s personal recollections of Joseph Smith of necessity refer to the period prior to the late summer of 1822 and are probably no later than 1820, the latest date of Palmyra memoirs in his writings.

Orsamus Turner declined to dignify Mormonism with a serious treatment. Instead he preferred satire, admitting that his sketch was made “lightly—with a seeming levity.” Although it relies heavily upon community hearsay, and in sardonic tone reads like Gibbon on Christianity, certain portions of the sketch bring the early life of the Smiths into the focus of personal contact. One conclusion is based on “those who were best acquainted with the Smith family” and reports that “there is no foundation for the statement that their original manuscript was written by a Mr. Spaulding, of Ohio.”¹⁹ But the most notable break in the semiserious tone of derision is occasioned by the introduction of Joseph Smith into his narrative. At this point Turner gives impressions of his early life, prefacing these remarks with, “The author’s own recollections of him are distinct ones.”²⁰ A series of vignettes follow, portraying the young farmer’s son bringing small loads of wood into the village, doing odd jobs, and performing errands, one of which was to get the weekly paper. On one occasion Turner and another apprentice blackened Joseph’s face for his curiosity about the press. The sketch lapses back to more distant narration after the following final paragraph of personal recollection:

Chester O. Lewis, Niagara County Historian. Turner was born July 23, 1801. Turner’s complete words pertaining to his pre-Lockport life show that he did not stay long in Palmyra after completing his Canandaigua apprenticeship: “Resuming . . . a position . . . which had a commencement, but a few days after we had reached the age of 21 years.—(32 years ago) . . . *Then*, just out of our apprenticeship, and at school, we heard that a place called “Lockport” . . . had been made the county seat . . . and hearing further that a printer was wanted there, we journeyed from Palmyra passing through Rochester . . .”

¹⁷Turner, *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York* (Buffalo, 1849), p. 655.

¹⁸Frederick Follett, *History of the Press of Western New York* (Rochester, 1847), p. 65. Cf. Hamilton, *The Country Printer*, p. 304.

¹⁹Turner, *Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase*, p. 214.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 213.

But Joseph had a little ambition; and some very laudable aspirations; the mother's intellect occasionally shone out in him feebly, especially when he used to help us solve some portentous questions of moral or political ethics, in our juvenile debating club, which we moved down to the old red school house on Durfee street, to get rid of the annoyance of critics that used to drop in upon us in the village; and subsequently, after catching a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road, he was a very passable exhorter in evening meetings.²¹

Turner gives from his personal contact the time, place, and subject of the Prophet's early conversion. The time is probably during the editor's Palmyra apprenticeship, presumably 1820 or before, and is certainly no later than the summer of 1822. The semi-conversion is to Methodism, precisely the belief that Joseph Smith said he was partial to. The place is a "camp meeting" *away from Palmyra*. Consequently, the revivals in Palmyra during 1824-25 are in fact not germane to the Prophet's early religious experiences. "Camp meeting" is a technical term from that period, meaning extended preaching in a rural setting, ordinarily by several ministers of various ranks. Turner's "Vienna road" plainly means for him the road running diagonally between Palmyra and Vienna (now Phelps), about a dozen air miles away. The road is still identified by that name today on the official Wayne County map, and Turner's definition is proved by his location of a mill site "a mile east of the village [of Palmyra], on the Vienna road."²² "Away down in the woods" on this road

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 214. Although the Methodist records of the period in Palmyra are not now available, Turner's early history of that denomination shows that he personally knew more about its history in Palmyra than about any other church there: "The Methodist Church was organized in 1811. At first, few in number, and feeble in resources, its places of worship alternated from school house to school house; sometimes in an apartment at a private dwelling; at others in a vacant log dwelling;—until having largely recruited its numbers, it emerged from its feeble condition, and in 1821 erected its present church edifice."

Early existence of the "juvenile debating club" at the "old red school house on Durfee Street" is confirmed by periodic newspaper notices to "the young people of the village of Palmyra and its vicinity" inviting attendance at "a debating school at the school house near Mr. Billings'." See *Western Farmer*, January 23, 1822. The similarity of later notices shows that this particular one did not inaugurate the society, which had a history of moving around considerably before locating in the schoolhouse, according to Turner.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 389. Cf. a traveler's sarcastic reaction to an obstruction blocking this well-traveled highway "as I was entering your village, on what I understood to be the Vienna road." *Wayne Sentinel*, April 7, 1826. Cf. the complaint

would certainly be a considerable distance away from Palmyra; normally the camp meeting would not be held in the immediate neighborhood of any settlement.

Itinerant Methodist preachers were at the peak of their influence in Joseph Smith's youth, and their rural protracted meetings were so common that they were taken for granted. One was noticed in 1820 in the *Palmyra Register* because of the unfortunate death of one James Couser as a result of his intoxication on June 25 at "a camp meeting which was held in this vicinity." In the following issue the editor denied that he intended "to charge the Methodists with retailing ardent spirits" at their camp ground, thus identifying the sponsoring sect.²³ The preachers' memoirs of this period are filled with references to these "forest gatherings," which drew their audience from the countryside of up to ten to twenty miles' radius. This is quite inconceivable to many in the present sedentary culture, but the pioneer's life was lonely, and he paid the price of travel for his religious and social meetings. Turner remembers an eight-mile trip by ox-sled as nothing unusual for "an evening's visit," and he quotes a settler as recalling the "itinerating Methodist ministers; we used to go through the woods, generally on foot, whenever we heard of one of their appointments."²⁴

The most dramatic possibility among camp meetings in the period of Joseph Smith's investigations is the annual Genesee Conference held in July of 1819 at Vienna, both geographically and chronologically near Turner's recalling Joseph Smith's "catching a spark of Methodism." Over a hundred Methodist ministers were obligated to attend the business sessions, which ran from July 1 to July 8, suspending formal business on Sunday, July 4, for the typically spectacular preaching services.²⁵ This Sabbath meeting of the annual conference is depicted in the recollections of the preacher-historian George Peck. Al-

of the later deterioration of "the road between this village and Vienna." *The Reflector*, Palmyra, N.Y., Sept. 23, 1829.

²³*Palmyra Register*, June 28, 1820, July 5, 1820. The extended services were presumably being held prior to these dates.

²⁴Turner, *Holland Purchase*, pp. 542, 555.

²⁵For basic dates and general information on the 1819 conference, see F. W. Conable, *History of the Genesee Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1876), pp. 158-161. The statistics of the ministers obligated to attend are found in *Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America for the Year 1819* (New York, 1819), pp. 51-52.

though held in the country area of Genoa in 1818, only a "neighboring grove" could accommodate "the crowds which gathered from far and near." In 1816 in the relatively rural Sauquoit-Paris locality there was an attendance of between 3,000 and 4,000, which is some measure of the 1821 gatherings in the same place where "sermons in the grove" were given "before a crowded congregation."²⁶ The Sunday meeting of the annual conference at Palmyra in 1826 was held "in a fine grove" nearby, and "it is said that not less than ten thousand persons were on the ground during the day."²⁷ Within a few years of the 1819 Genesee Conference at Vienna, it was a regular item of business at the opening session to appoint supervisors of preaching, and impressive services were undoubtedly held in that year which drew crowds from the area in which fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith lived.^{27a}

POMEROY TUCKER

Joseph Smith may have had a double reason to attend the camp meetings in his vicinity. The main evidence on this point comes from Turner's fellow apprentice in Palmyra, Pomeroy Tucker. Tucker's career was remarkably like Turner's, though he lived longer. Born in Palmyra August 10, 1802, he evidently remained there until the time of his apprenticeship at the

²⁶George Peck, *The Life and Times of Rev. George Peck, D. D.* (New York, 1874), pp. 65, 93, 122. The rivalry for proselytes at conversion appears regularly in the memoirs of Methodist preachers. For instance, Peck comments (p. 110): "When conversions began to occur among us, the Baptists, by whom we were surrounded, began to practice their usual strategy. . . . [T]wo preachers of that persuasion . . . were very attentive to our converts."

²⁷W. H. McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New York* (Philadelphia, 1877), p. 149. The basic concept of the Prophet's history of an expanding regional revival fits the Methodist conference context. Compare, for instance, the pattern described for the 1817 Genesee Conference. The "daily and powerful preaching" brought the following result: "a flame of religious excitement spread out among the circuits . . ." Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, n.d.), Vol. 4, p. 278. Although the number of converts in that case is perhaps unusual, the idea of one conference affecting wide areas is fairly typical in Methodist literature. All of this shows that it is unduly restrictive to assume that Joseph Smith's descriptions refer only or essentially to the narrow area of his residence.

^{27a}The very specific history of Methodism in Vienna-Phelps later alluded to the "deep impression upon the entire community" of the 1819 Genesee Conference there, after which "another great revival followed," bringing "numerous accessions," including several named individuals. W. H. McIntosh, *History of Ontario County, New York* (Philadelphia, 1876), p. 170. The historian must be concerned with religious awakenings as perceived by Joseph Smith, not general statistics that he would not have been aware of.

Palmyra Register around 1820.²⁸ After serving as a journeyman printer at Canandaigua, he returned to Palmyra to purchase and manage the *Wayne Sentinel* in the fall of 1823.²⁹ His professional life as a journalist continued over thirty years, mostly with that paper, though he was also a public servant at various levels and author of a book on Mormonism in 1867, three years before his death.

From the point of view of history, Tucker's *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* is a disappointing performance. With access to the generation that remembered the establishment of the Prophet's work, the experienced editor is content to quote the Hurlburt-Howe affidavits, to repeat common gossip, to quote extensive portions of the Book of Mormon and articles about Brigham Young for the bulk of the book. Although but weakly living up to the subtitle ("Personal Remembrances and Historical Collections Hitherto Unwritten"), Tucker does relate much valuable information concerning the period of the publication of the Book of Mormon. He also claims knowledge of the Smiths "since their removal to Palmyra from Vermont in 1816, and during their continuance there and in the adjoining town of Manchester."³⁰ There is no reason to question this firsthand contact, provided one is on guard not to take his western New York prejudice for fact. It is to his credit that he could at least distinguish between the two. He repeats tattered stories about Joseph Smith's dishonesty, only to admit in "common fairness" that such allegations were "not within the remembrance of the writer."³¹ Although Tucker is content to repeat the armchair observations about the laziness of the Smiths, every one of his specific descriptions proves the opposite. Most of Tucker's unattributed particulars of the Smiths' early Palmyra life are probably based on his observation. His negative material from Palmyra is generally traceable to known statements, and the "hitherto

²⁸Turner, *Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, p. 499.

²⁹Tucker's first issue of the *Wayne Sentinel* (October 1, 1823) still exists. Information on his apprenticeship at Canandaigua appears in the best sketch of his life, written as an obituary for the *Troy Times* by his son-in-law, John M. Francis, copied in the *Palmyra Courier*, July 8, 1870, and the *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, July 2, 1870. See also Follett, *History of the Press in Western New York*, p. 63, and Hamilton, *The Country Printer*, pp. 303-304.

³⁰Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York, 1867), p. 4.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 15.

unwritten" incidents are typically details of human interest. The descriptions of the Smiths in Palmyra prior to 1820 tend to belong to this category.

Tucker is particular with regard to the Smiths' arrival in 1816 and removal to the pioneer homestead in Manchester in 1818, and he has a fairly accurate knowledge of their physical and financial arrangements, evidently quite independent of the already published details of Lucy Smith. There is no reason to question the picture of the refreshment shop of the Smiths in Palmyra, which catered to holiday crowds. Even after the move to Manchester, there was "the continued business of peddling cake and beer in the village on days of public doings." Tucker remembers Joseph in particular "as a clerk" in such selling.³² This activity, somewhat attested in contemporary sources, provides a practical reason for camp meeting attendance.³³ Such meetings were notoriously places of socializing and festivity. De Witt Clinton left a classic description of the typical campground of that decade, featuring not merely the preaching and the crowds, but the "persons with cakes, beer, and other refreshments for sale."³⁴ It appears to be the Smiths' business and Joseph's special charge to be present at such public events in the vicinity.

Pomeroy Tucker also verifies the circumstances of the First Vision, all the more important because his main support is unintended. Assuming 1827 as the beginning of Joseph Smith's revelations, the editor relates the "remarkable vision" that

³²*Ibid.*, p. 14. Tucker's summary of the Smith's Manchester holiday business stresses that young Joseph was regularly vending and sometimes tricked by "the boys of those by-gone times."

³³In 1831 young James Gordon Bennett wrote his tongue-in-cheek impressions of the Smiths from interviews with some who had known them. It is probably better-than-average hearsay when he reports the father as a former "country pedlar" dealing in "the manufacture of gingerbread and such like domestic wares." His son Joseph is portrayed as being "a partner in the concern," who aimlessly hung around the "villages," perhaps an indication of the travelling to special gatherings that Tucker specifically mentions. See *New York Courier and Enquirer*, August 31, 1831. One of Bennett's sources was E. B. Grandin, who was closely associated with Tucker in business and social affairs, so it is perhaps no accident that the story of the Smiths' holiday business should be similar from these two sources. Tucker's fullest description of their goods for sale is in the setting of the Palmyra residence: "gingerbread, pies, boiled eggs, root-beer, and other like notions of traffic." (*Origin of Mormonism*, p. 12.)

³⁴The citation of Clinton's "Private Canal Journal, 1810" is found in William W. Campbell, *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton* (New York, 1849), p. 107. Increasing population makes such activity even more likely for camp meetings in 1820.

came "about this time" in response to the youth's prayer "in the wilderness." The words of this experience are generally placed in quotation marks, and the phrases are borrowed in sequence from Orson Pratt's pamphlet, *Remarkable Visions*.³⁵ Tucker depends verbally on this written source, although he seems to have some memory of what young Joseph Smith said about the First Vision while still in Palmyra. But in Tucker's first chapter, where Mormon writings are not in evidence and the editor's personal reminiscences are heavily concentrated, the following description of the early religious life of the Prophet is given:

Protracted revival meetings were customary in some of the churches, and Smith frequented those of different denominations, sometimes professing to participate in their devotional exercises. At one time he joined the probationary class of the Methodist Church in Palmyra, and made some active demonstrations of engagedness, though his assumed convictions were insufficiently grounded or abiding to carry him along to the saving point of conversion, and he soon withdrew from the class. The final conclusion announced by him was, that all sectarianism was fallacious, all the churches on a false foundation, and the Bible a fable.³⁶

No other source is this particular in identifying young Joseph Smith as a member of the Methodist "probationary class." Since Tucker immediately follows with a reference to "all the early avowals and other evidences remembered," he seems to be saying that he has firsthand knowledge of Joseph's temporary religious affiliation and reason for its abrupt termination: he publicly "announced . . . that all sectarianism was fallacious. . . ." A study of Turner requires a date of about 1820 for this tentative Methodist association, and Tucker emphasizes that "he soon withdrew from the class," a specific description that explains Turner's metaphor, "a spark of Methodism." This evidence indicates that about 1820 Joseph Smith was openly expressing the identical convictions that he later

³⁵Tucker, *Origin of Mormonism*, p. 28. Compare the descriptions of the First Vision and the angel's first revelation of the Book of Mormon in any of the editions of Orson Pratt, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*. Proof that this source was used over other possibilities with the same phrasing is the quotation of Pratt's rendering of the Moroni visitation. Compare Turner's quotation of the closing portion of *Remarkable Visions*, pp. 139-145.

³⁶Tucker, *Origin of Mormonism*, pp. 17-18. See footnote 39 below. Tucker is the origin of derivative material in McIntosh, *History of Wayne County*, p. 150.

maintained came at that early time through the First Vision. Since such negative attitudes could have only brought scorn upon him, it is unlikely that a fourteen-year-old boy would take this extreme position without some religious experience to solidify his personal convictions.

The historical reconstruction of Joseph's announcement about 1820 that the churches were wrong throws a different light on subsequent community opinion. None of the Hurlburt-Howe affidavits reach back to this critical early period, and therefore all are suspect on the ground of merely reporting public reaction to Joseph's early religious experiences. Mrs. Brodie classically stated a thesis that is found in Palmyra sources in several contradictory forms. By this theory, the earlier Joseph Smith was a seeker of buried treasure, not the sincere religious investigator that he describes himself to be in all of his vision accounts. Supposedly, the metamorphosis from adventuring to outward religion took place about 1827. A standard and crucial proof in building this image is Abner Cole's 1831 summary of the evolutionary hypothesis: ". . . it however appears quite certain that the prophet himself never made any serious pretensions to religion until his late pretended revelation."³⁷

Contemporaneous quotations, however, are not the same thing as contemporaneous sources. Cole, alias Dogberry, attributes his information on the mother and father of the Prophet to others, and also implies secondhand information on Joseph Smith. In 1820 Abner Cole was middle-aged and a successful lawyer-entrepreneur, with no reason to notice a teenager from rural Manchester. But the apprentices Tucker and Turner were near the young Prophet's age level and moved in the same social and perhaps religious circles. Yet Cole's statement is not merely uninformed. Tucker's initial chapter of impressions about the Smiths shows that Cole virtually means the opposite of what he says. Pomeroy Tucker portrays Joseph as a young man of unusual "taciturnity," speaking mainly to "his intimate associates" and generally ridiculed because he could relate a "marvelous absurdity with the utmost apparent gravity."³⁸ Is this the community response to Joseph's limited narration of his vision? The Palmyra editor has his own evolutionary

³⁷*The Reflector*, Palmyra, N.Y., February 1, 1831.

³⁸Tucker, *Origin of Mormonism*, p. 16.

theory of the young Prophet advancing from reading worthless fiction to serious study of the Bible. In fact, as a student of the Scriptures, he became so capable that he could discuss texts "with great assurance," and with "original and unique" interpretations. What all this proved to Tucker is highly instructive. Joseph Smith came to "disgustingly blasphemous" conclusions which, coupled with his religious investigation and announcement that he would join no sect, disclosed that he and his family "were unqualified atheists," an inevitable "hypothesis" based on "their mockeries of Christianity."³⁹

Tucker's reasoning shows that most epithets applied to the Smiths may well be grounded in their religious dissent. If he can equate unorthodoxy with atheism, then the historian knows that he is dealing with a rigid social structure whose labels on nonconformity cannot be taken at face value. Cole's report that the early Joseph Smith "never made any serious pretensions to religion" really means that he declined to affiliate with any church. Paradoxically, the original announcement of religious convictions created a reputation for irreligion, and the closed society that so perceived the young Prophet largely concentrated on its own terminology and lost the memory of his earlier religious investigations and convictions about 1820, which were recorded by his acquaintances Turner and Tucker.⁴⁰

No one can seriously test Joseph Smith's first revelations without treating in depth the leading source of his early personal life, his mother's *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*. Its importance requires a brief survey of its composition and

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18. The knowledge of the Bible attributed to Joseph Smith by Turner make his remark suspect that Joseph announced the "Bible a fable." The memoirs of Lucy, Joseph, and William all agree that reverence for the scriptures characterized the Smith home.

⁴⁰Tucker's chapter immediately following Joseph's announcement that the churches stood on a "false foundation" is a recital of the community tradition of his money-digging activities. This repetition adds nothing, for he is merely warming over "affidavits" in print thirty years before his book. But the Palmyra editor repeatedly insists that Joseph's deceptions began late in 1819 and continued "from 1820 to 1827" (p. 22). If these stories originated in community prejudice after the Smiths began telling of Joseph's revelations (as William Smith spiritedly insists), then the existence of the rumors dates the early religious claims of the Smiths at around 1820. Tucker accepted this same chronology a decade before his book, as shown in his newspaper recollections of June 11, 1858, in the *Palmyra Courier*. Talking then about "the origin of Mormonism," he dates Joseph's "gift of supernatural endowments" as beginning "as early as 1820." His odd identification of Joseph Smith as then "at the age of about 19 years" may be accounted for by the young Prophet's large physical stature.

publication. Since Lucy Mack Smith dictated rather than personally wrote the book, the first question is whether it is really her history. Both author and secretary expressed clear opinions on this subject. As the compilation closed late in 1845, Mother Smith in a public speech "gave notice that she had written her history, and wished it printed before we leave this place."⁴¹ The motivation for the history and the intention to make it her own was earlier stated in the midst of its composition:

People are often inquiring of me the particulars of Joseph's getting the plates, seeing the angels at first, and many other things which Joseph never wrote or published. I have told over many things pertaining to these matters to different persons to gratify their curiosity, indeed have almost destroyed my lungs giving these recitals to those who felt anxious to hear them. I have now concluded to write down every particular as far as possible . . .⁴²

The above claims of Lucy Smith are specifically confirmed by the remarkable pair who produced the history, Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, and her husband, Howard Coray. The latter, a young schoolteacher, was asked by Brigham Young to drop regular work and devote his entire time to the project.⁴³ His wife, a woman of native brilliance and intense dedication, had first agreed to be Lucy Smith's secretary—Howard Coray later insisted "to act, in the matter, only as her, Mother Smith's, amanuensis."⁴⁴ In 1902 Martha Jane's daughter described her mother as essentially the recorder of dictation: "She then read over, several times, what she had written, making such changes and corrections as Mother Smith suggested."⁴⁵ In 1865 Mrs. Coray evaluated her own work by indicating that her experiences in regularly taking down the discourses of Joseph Smith and other Church leaders in Nauvoo had fitted her "to transmit to paper what the old lady said, and prompted me in

⁴¹Address of October 8, 1845, cit. *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 6, No. 16 (November 1, 1845), p. 1014.

⁴²Letter of Lucy Smith to William Smith, June 23, 1845, Nauvoo, Illinois, ms., LDS Historian's Office. Modifications in quotations in this article are restricted to punctuation and spelling.

⁴³Autobiography of Howard Coray (1883), p. 16; Xerox at LDS Historian's Office, original held by Jennie N. Weeks, Salt Lake City. For the payment of Coray for the services, see Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1932), Vol. 7, p. 519.

⁴⁴Coray, *Autobiography*, p. 16.

⁴⁵Martha J. C. Lewis, "Martha Jane Knowlton Coray," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 5 (1902), p. 440.

undertaking to secure all the information possible for myself and children . . . ”⁴⁶

Howard Coray's function was evidently to transcribe the final copy from his wife's corrected interview notes. Three manuscripts are known to have existed: the loose sheets of Mrs. Coray's corrected notes; the copy presented to Mother Smith, which found its way into Orson Pratt's hands as the basis for the first printed edition; and the beautifully written, leather-bound presentation copy to the Church, with which the quotations in this article have been checked.⁴⁷ Textual differences between Orson Pratt's printing and the last-named finished manuscript may reflect different drafts of the Corays, but most variants are matters of form (word order, synonyms) and not substance. The finished manuscript thus supports the printed texts in content, varying essentially in minor ways familiar to the student of the closely similar manuscripts of the Greek New Testament.

The first edition of Mother Smith's history was published in 1853, three years before her death. Although this printing was recalled for correction, the scope of errors is extremely limited. The basic work of revision was done by the Prophet's cousin, George A. Smith (with the help of Elias Smith), and his correction copies of the first edition are not marked up severely. He modified certain dates, substituted firsthand information for some of Lucy's secondhand impressions, and deleted a few passages where the mother had glorified William Smith. This revised edition was published in 1902 with a preface by Joseph F. Smith recommending the book as a "worthy record" containing "much interesting and valuable information, found in no other publication, relating to the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith . . ."⁴⁸ The accuracy of

⁴⁶Letter of Martha Jane Coray to Brigham Young, June 13, 1865, Provo, Utah, LDS Historian's Office.

⁴⁷The original working sheets were donated to the LDS Historian's Office. Jennie N. Weeks, *et al.*, *Roberts Family* (Salt Lake City, 1965), p. 403. Although the whereabouts of the manuscript Orson Pratt used is unknown, his edition is less perfect textually than is often supposed, a point of vindication of Brigham Young's judgment.

⁴⁸Lucy Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, rev. by George A. Smith and Elias Smith (Salt Lake City, 1902), p. iv. To confuse bibliography further, the latest revision by Preston Nibley was entitled *History of Joseph Smith*. Pratt's *Biographical Sketches* avoids confusion with Joseph Smith's own history, and is also more accurate, since Lucy Smith is not writing a full history, but mainly recollections of the early life of her son.

Mother Smith's recollections of the early history of the family's religious experience was never at any point challenged.

If no expert produces a history without errors, it is beside the point to parade those of Lucy Smith. Her dates that are not precise are nevertheless close approximations. Her inaccuracies are inherent in the nature of her work. A book of dictated memoirs cannot check out events and eliminate the errors of hearsay. This is another way of saying that Mother Smith is highly reliable on the events with which she was personally connected. For instance, Lucy Mack Smith's first eight chapters are devoted to her father's family and harmonize with facts uncovered by rigorous genealogical investigations.⁴⁹ It is questionable whether she ever had access to the Prophet's unpublished addendum concerning his early sickness and the details of the family's move from New England to New York. But the independent recollections of mother and son on these subjects mesh perfectly.⁵⁰ *Biographical Sketches* is at its best in the early period of his life. Whereas the sections pertaining to Mormon history in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois are really short summaries, the largest section (a full third of the book) details the events in Palmyra-Manchester to 1831.

Lucy Mack Smith writes with confident pride in her family and children, but on an apparently factual level with an instinct for the relevant. For instance, her treatment of the childhood of Joseph is marked by sensible restraint that omits a mother's fond memories. Before the First Vision, there are only four items about Joseph: his birth, the terrible physical trauma of his leg operation, his difficulties of recovery, and an unexplained attempt upon his life. She acknowledges that people have constantly questioned her in the hope of hearing "many very remarkable incidents" connected with "his childhood," but Lucy simply observes that the young Prophet's youth was filled with normal "trivial circumstances" that deserve to be passed by "in silence."⁵¹ Because her history is no pious catalog of the marvelous about her son, her emphasis

⁴⁹See Archibald F. Bennett, "Solomon Mack and His Family," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 58-59 (1955-56), September through May.

⁵⁰Compare *Biographical Sketches*, chapters 16-17 with LDS Historian's Book A-1, note A, p. 132.

⁵¹Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Liverpool, 1853), p. 73.

on his First Vision is likely based on an honest judgment that this was the most significant experience of his youth.

Biographical Sketches accurately recreates the world of Palmyra, New York, in the decade of the 1820's. The pattern of buying land on contract, the pioneer struggle for economic survival, and many prominent personalities are all correctly portrayed. Both Lucy Smith's narrative and the surviving newspapers mention Dr. Robinson, Dr. McIntire, Squire Cole, Henry Jessup, Abner Lakey, or Flanders Dyke.⁵² Even Mother Smith's ambiguities contain basic historical truth. For instance, she described the reprinting of pirated portions of the Book of Mormon in the "Dogberry Paper on Winter Hill." Although these extracts were actually printed in the satirical *Reflector*, the *nom de plume* of its proprietor was Obadiah Dogberry, who referred to his headquarters as "Winter Green Hill," a drumlin connected with Palmyra history. One heirloom survives that symbolizes the accuracy of Lucy Smith's personal history. Her descriptions of family economics include her contribution of preparing and painting oilcloth,⁵³ and the quaintly decorated oilcloth binding of an early Hyrum Smith journal is evidently a piece of her handiwork.⁵⁴

Another event described during the printing of the Book of Mormon is the visit of "three delegates" to persuade the Smith family to drop their new religion. Lucy mingles it with a conspiracy to take the printer's manuscript from her, which is impossible to test. But the official warning by "Deacon Beckwith" is related both in Mother Smith's recollections and also local Presbyterians' records. She reports the committee's conversation about the church to which she "and the most of your children have belonged to."⁵⁵ Upon warning of the pos-

⁵²Not only the names of the individuals listed, but their known personalities and relationships are accurately portrayed in *Biographical Sketches*. An example is her reference to "Deacon Jessup," who is referred to by that title in the *Wayne Sentinel*, April 7, 1826, in a manner that suggests some of the materialistic values attributed to him by Lucy Smith (*Biographical Sketches*, p. 91).

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 70, 107.

⁵⁴At this writing it is in the possession of Ralph G. Smith of Salt Lake City, Utah, a direct descendant.

⁵⁵Lucy Smith says that she was baptized but free of "any religious denomination" until Alvin had "attained his twenty-second year." *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 48-49. This date is the spring of 1820, when the normal reading of Joseph Smith's history places the Presbyterian conversion of Lucy and three children. The absence of the earliest Presbyterian records from Palmyra makes it impossible yet to verify the time of formal affiliation of the Smiths with that

sibility of "losing you," Beckwith charged Lucy not to say anything further on the subject of the new revelation. Receiving a defiant reply from the mother, the group sought a recantation concerning the Book of Mormon from Hyrum, who stood firm in his convictions, and a similar unyielding conversation ensued with Samuel.⁵⁶ This incident is confirmed by the Presbyterian minutes in Palmyra, which report that on March 3, 1830, a committee was appointed consisting of Reverend A. E. Campbell and Henry Jessup "to visit Hyrum Smith, Lucy Smith, and Samuel Harrison Smith and report at the next meeting . . ." On March 10, 1830, the group "reported that they had visited them and received no satisfaction . . . and that they did not wish to unite with us any more."⁵⁷ Either the official delegation was accompanied by George Beckwith, named as a fellow elder in the same minutes with Henry Jessup, or Lucy confounded the two men in her recollection. But basic detail is correct and her date is fairly precise.⁵⁸ Thus Lucy Smith's memories of the early events of the rise of Mormonism have a demonstrable degree of accuracy.

Joseph Smith first confided his 1820 vision to his mother,⁵⁹ and she verifies his chronology by incorporating his longest vision account immediately after relating an 1819 event. Before this experience she mentions "a great revival in religion"

church. Since William remembered the resentment of his father against Rev. Stockton for preaching at Alvin's funeral and intimating his damnation, the Presbyterian preference of part of the family by 1823 seems clear, a point confirmed by the Nauvoo addendum incorporated into the present printing of Joseph's history, wherein the Prophet remarks to his mother after the First Vision that "Presbyterianism is not true." Lucy's account of the 1824-25 revivals is ambiguous on the point of whether she then "joined in with" the Presbyterian church or the union meetings. There may be various degrees of "joining" a church.

⁵⁶Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 145-147.

⁵⁷"Records of the Sessions of the Presbyterian Church in Palmyra," Vol. 2, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁸Lucy inverted the two events of the Presbyterian committee and Joseph's formal warning to Cole against pirating his copyrighted book. She narrates the former event after the "printing went on very well for a season," which would be some months after August 1829, and the second event after that, but some time before April 1830. Cole's Book of Mormon extracts appeared in January 1830, and the committee incident occurred at the beginning of March of that year. But both events, if transposed, are placed within precise time limits in the correct year. Such a performance renders it historically irresponsible to challenge Lucy Smith's chronology without contemporary evidence that is not secondary.

⁵⁹Note B, LDS Historian's Book A-1, pp. 132-133, reproduced in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Vol. I, p. 6. As Dean Jessee shows, the notes were dictated by Joseph Smith to Willard Richards.

that extended to "the surrounding country in which we resided."⁶⁰ Such a general term is in marked contrast to her subsequent descriptions of revivals after the death of Alvin (November 19, 1823) that were locally identified as in "the neighborhood." Although the family was actively involved in this later movement, "Joseph, from the first, utterly refused to attend their meetings . . ." The young Prophet had strong views that such participation would be temporary, "for we were mistaken in them . . ."⁶¹ Lucy Smith thus describes her son as having reached the conclusion prior to 1824 that the churches were wrong.⁶² The revivals of that year had nothing to do with his initial religious investigations.

There is additional evidence that this chronology was firmly fixed in her mind. The most shocking experience to the family in that period was the death of the eldest son, the beloved Alvin. Lucy recalls his belief in the early revelations and also relates his deathbed charge to young Joseph to be strictly faithful to divine commandments "to obtain the record." The date of this event is recorded on the gravestone inscription, "November 19, 1823."⁶³ Unless one prefers to believe the gruesome theory that a mother would deliberately put false words into the mouth of a favored dying son, it is clear that the period of Joseph's religious inquiries long preceded his developed convictions of the fall of 1823.

Not claiming firsthand information, Orsamus Turner relates some intriguing stories that supposedly circulated before the death of Alvin. Turner claims that Lucy Smith gave out early hints "that a Prophet was to spring from her humble household." Rumors represented this person to be "Alvah,"

⁶⁰Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 74.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

⁶²The date intended by Lucy for Alvin's death is not clear yet. Orson Pratt's edition gives 1824 (*Biographical Sketches*, p. 87), but the ink of the finished manuscript reads 1822, which is inconsistent with the same document's reading of 1824 in the genealogical chapter (*ibid.*, p. 40). The event, however, appears in proper sequence after the 1823 revelation of the Book of Mormon plates. If the foregoing data accurately represents Mother Smith, then her memory moved a year in either direction of the actual date, though the rediscovery of the original draft of Mrs. Coray at the LDS Historian's Office may throw further light on the question.

⁶³Photographs of the inscription are at the LDS Historian's Office. It reads: "In memory of Alvin, son of Joseph and Lucy Smith, who died Nov. 19, 1823, in the 25th year of his age." Joseph Smith, Sr., counteracted rumors regarding exhuming the body by an advertisement bearing the date September 25, 1824, which proves that Alvin's death was not that year. See footnote 65 below.

designated by "fireside consultations, and solemn and mysterious out door hints."⁶⁴ That crude ridicule filled Palmyra after the death of Alvin is historical fact. Joseph Smith, Sr., became so exasperated that he purchased space in the *Wayne Sentinel* for six weeks beginning September 29, 1824, to refute gossip that Alvin's body had been exhumed and dissected. He added his candid judgment that the originators of such stories "have been stimulated more by a desire to injure the reputation of certain persons than a philanthropy for the peace and welfare of myself and friends."⁶⁵ The Prophet's history claims that public contempt was heaped upon his head because he told of his First Vision, and social scorn of his family is an established reality by the fall of 1824. As to the cause of such ridicule, some have suggested the Smiths' supposed money-digging activities, but that is speculation. Lucy Smith specifically comments on the period after the 1820 First Vision:

From this time until the twenty-first of September, 1823, Joseph continued, as usual, to labour with his father . . . though he suffered, as one would naturally suppose, every kind of opposition and persecution from the different orders of religion.⁶⁶

Since this interpretive comment is added directly after the quoted portions of the First Vision, the author is alleging a natural relationship between the greatness of the new revelation and the shocked reaction of the orthodox. Because of Lucy Mack Smith's historical orientation, the story of the First Vision is told in the words of her son, but her personal observations verify the specific chronology and surrounding circumstances that he claimed for the experience.⁶⁷

OLIVER COWDERY

Since Oliver Cowdery and William Smith narrated early Church history without mentioning the First Vision, it has been

⁶⁴Turner, *Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, p. 213.

⁶⁵Joseph Smith, "To the Public," September 25, 1824, *Wayne Sentinel*, September 29, October 6, 13, 20, 27, November 3, 1824.

⁶⁶Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 78.

⁶⁷Mother Smith's prologue letter probably indicates an emphasis in her history on the "many other things which Joseph never wrote or published" (see footnote 42 above). The distinct pattern of her work is to quote from established sources and supplement from her personal experiences, which had limited relevance to her son's individual search and answer of 1820.

assumed that their silence proves that the event did not occur. Both associate Joseph Smith's revival investigations with 1823 instead of 1820, but in each case there is an apparent reason for this procedure that is consistent with the reality of the First Vision. Cowdery made the first public attempt to narrate pre-1830 Church history in letters to the 1834-35 *Messenger and Advocate*. It is incorrect to say that he wrote without an awareness of the First Vision. It may be that the reason for leaving it out is ambiguous, but, as shown in this issue by Dean Jessee, the initial manuscript history of the First Vision was entered in official Church records at least two years before Cowdery's history. When he stated that he would utilize "authentic documents now in our possession," it is virtually certain that he was alluding to the 1831-32 account.⁶⁸ There is a clear verbal relationship between the two narrations, although the simple language of the earlier record is obviously not to the taste of Cowdery, with his early talent for ornate eloquence. Essential dependence upon the 1831-32 account is also minimized by the personal availability of Joseph Smith for consultation, a point which the editor stresses at the beginning of his letters and demonstrates by direct quotes in their progress. But at two points where the Prophet's personal experiences are narrated, identical phrases or structural similarities betray Cowdery's use of the earlier document.

ANGEL'S WARNING RECORDED TWICE

The final *Messenger and Advocate* installment (October 1835) depicted an incident that had not yet appeared in any LDS writing except the 1831-32 manuscript history. This was the first view of the plates by the young Joseph, who was so overwhelmed with their value that he reached to take them for selfish motives, only to be checked and rebuked in a sudden appearance of the divine messenger. Both accounts refer to the angel's original warning in identical words: the Prophet was directed to obtain the plates with "an eye single to the glory of God." Both accounts record the same question of

⁶⁸*L.D.S. Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (October, 1834), p. 13. Cowdery confessed his personal incompetence on the early life of the Prophet: "Indeed, there are many items connected with the forepart of this subject that render his labor indispensable." For evidence of Cowdery's early awareness of the First Vision in addition to the 1831-32 manuscript history, see footnote 86 below.

frustration: "Why can I not obtain this book?" And the answer of the angel is identical in each: "You have not kept the commandments of the Lord."⁶⁹

The conclusion of interrelationship is reinforced by comparing the earliest religious conflict of Joseph Smith in the two documents. Mere verbal correlations do not always prove dependence, but added to these is a precise sequence of events that indicates that Cowdery composed his sketch of Joseph's first religious investigations with the 1831-32 manuscript history before him:

1831-32 Manuscript History

. . . my mind became seriously impressed with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal soul . . .

. . . I discovered they did not adorn their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository. This was a grief to my soul.

. . . there was no society or denomination that built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament, and I felt to mourn . . .

Therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy, for there was none else to whom I could go . . .

December 1834, Cowdery Letter

. . . his mind was led to more seriously contemplate the importance of a move of this kind.

To profess godliness without its benign influence upon the heart, was a thing so foreign from his feelings, that his spirit was not at rest day or night.

To unite with a society professing to be built upon the only sure foundation, and that profession be a vain one, was calculated . . . to arouse the mind . . .

In this situation where could he go?

If Oliver Cowdery demonstrably followed the 1831-32 document in rehearsing the background of the First Vision, why didn't he report the full event as found in that history? If the reason for the break in narrative is hypothetical, the interruption is obvious. As shown by the above quotations,

⁶⁹The only full text yet published of the 1831-32 manuscript history is that of Paul Cheesman, "An Analysis of the Accounts Relating Joseph Smith's Early Visions" (BYU Thesis, 1965). It has some minor inaccuracies. The phrases quoted appear as such in ms. and in Cheesman, p. 130. Cowdery differs from the 1831-32 account in the quoted phrases only by the substitution of "this book" for "them," whose antecedent is "the plates." The phrases are found in Vol. I (February, 1835), p. 80, and Vol. II (October, 1835), p. 198.

Cowdery's entire emphasis in recounting the Prophet's first religious experience was on the question of which church to join, a point of agreement with every official record of Joseph Smith.⁷⁰ Confusion stemmed from the "strong solicitations to unite with one of those different societies," but no man could solve this specific problem:

In this situation where could he go? If he went to one he was told they were right, and all others were wrong— If to another, the same was heard from those. . . . [A] proof from some source was wanting to settle the mind and give peace to the agitated bosom.⁷¹

But after virtually stating that only God could answer the problem of which church was right, Cowdery records no prayer on that subject or any answer to that question. In the next installment, the revivals are glossed over, and a transition is made to a new situation:

[O]ur brother's mind was unusually wrought up on the subject which had so long agitated his mind . . . and *all he desired* was to be prepared in heart to commune with some kind messenger who could communicate to him *the desired information of acceptance with God*.^{71a}

In Cowdery's narrative the answer to this prayer matches the second circumstance where church conflict is not significant:

⁷⁰The point made in the text is not that the quest for personal forgiveness was absent from the first prayer of 1820, but that no vision narrative omits the overwhelming problem that then consumed Joseph's thought, which church to join, a feature totally absent from any relation of the next revelation in 1823.

Only the 1835 account omits the message of the First Vision that all the churches were wrong. But this same version shows the confusion of Joseph on existing churches as the reason for praying. The 1835 narration was not dictated as a comprehensive record but differs from every other account in being the secretary's notes of a private conversation of the Prophet on the subject. So the feature of the vision evaluating the churches as incorrect could have been arbitrarily omitted in the flow of conversation or left out by a scribe who did not keep up entirely with what was said. Yet the background narrated in 1835 logically implies that even on that occasion the Prophet had in mind a revelation including God's evaluation of Christian divisions:

"Being wrought up in my mind respecting the subject of religion, and looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong, but considered it of the first importance to me that I should be right . . . Being thus perplexed in mind I retired to the silent grove . . . Information was what I most desired at this time . . ."

⁷¹*L.D.S. Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (December 1834), p. 43. Since verbal dependence demonstrates Cowdery's reading of the first manuscript history describing the 1820 theophany, the phrase in the 1823 context regarding the certainty of an answer to prayer "if a Supreme being did exist," must be regarded as Cowdery's rhetoric and of mere logical force in the sentence, not an intended historical reference.

^{71a}*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (February, 1835), p. 76. Italics added.

an angel brought the message "that his sins were forgiven, and that his prayers were heard . . ." By date and verbal dependence, it is known that Cowdery had access to the 1831-32 document, which described two different prayers and two responding visions. Because the logical Cowdery presented differing prayer situations but an answer to only one of them, it must be assumed that he left out reference to the First Vision for a reason.

It is hard to avoid the impression that the second elder was corrected by Joseph Smith and exercised his editorial privilege of saving face. The installment of December 1834, in which the First Vision background was given, dated the "excitement raised on the subject of religion" in the "15th year" of the Prophet's life, a time which is strictly December 23, 1819, to December 23, 1820. That period was presented with certain detail never confirmed in any account of Joseph Smith. Cowdery named the leading minister in these revivals as "one Mr. Lane, a presiding Elder of the Methodist Church," and identified the scene of his labors as "Palmyra, and vicinity." In the next installment (February 1835) this chronology was modified. Pleading "an error in the type," the editor said that the above events happened "in the 17th" year of Joseph Smith's life. Although this adjustment "would bring the date down to the year 1823," the correction is confused, since "the 17th" year is strictly December 23, 1821, to December 23, 1822. "I do not deem it necessary," the editor assures his audience, "to write further on the subject of this excitement." Yet this plan was not strictly followed, for Cowdery's narrative portrays the Prophet's continued search for "assurance that he was accepted of him" until 1823—"while this excitement continued." Is this a hint that the initial installment oversimplified an extended revival period described by the Prophet? It is specifically on the the point of chronology that Cowdery later admits imperfection:

I have now given you a rehearsal of what was communicated to our brother, when he was directed to go and obtain the record of the Nephites. I may have missed in arrangement in some instances, but the principle is preserved . . .⁷²

⁷²*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (April, 1835), p. 112.

Since Cowdery knew of the First Vision and began to describe its circumstances, his failure to continue implies a correction. One might envision a reprimand for giving public details of a sacred experience, though that is inconsistent with Joseph Smith's open description of the event for the Jewish minister Joshua some months afterward. The more likely point of departure is to isolate the only background information not confirmed by other Joseph Smith accounts, which pertains to Rev. Lane. As shown by Larry Porter's accompanying article, this Methodist leader had no Palmyra ministry until several years after 1819-20. Yet it is clear that he attended the 1819 Genesee Conference sessions in nearby Vienna-Phelps, for his name appears in the minutes, and a fellow-minister remembered that "he and I set off together on horseback" for the gathering.⁷³ Joseph Smith's proximity to this impressive occasion and his proven connection with Methodism about this time make it distinctly possible that the two had personal contact several years prior to Lane's residence at Palmyra. If Cowdery mistook an 1820 contact with Lane for a later Palmyra ministry, he probably advanced his chronology abruptly to coincide roughly with the later circumstances that he had unwittingly narrated. The absence of the First Vision in these circumstances is an accident of presentation never rectified because the letter-presentation of early history was terminated some months afterward. The next serious move to record these early events was inaugurated by the Prophet. Perhaps the possibility of misunderstanding convinced Joseph Smith that his personal history could only be accurately written by himself.

WILLIAM SMITH

As one of the more vocal and the latest male survivor of the Smith family, William Smith gave several extended memoirs of his brother's earliest religious experiences. The value of these recollections on the subject of the First Vision is severely limited by his youth. The probable peak of Joseph's intense religious investigation was 1819, and William had just turned eight years of age.⁷⁴ An example of his lack of firsthand in-

⁷³George Peck, *The Life and Times of Rev. George Peck, D. D.* (New York, 1874), p. 104. See also footnote 25 above.

⁷⁴He furnishes his own birthdate in *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, Iowa, 1883), p. 5. It is also found in Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 41: March 13, 1811.

formation about this period is his claim that the family moved from Palmyra village to the Manchester area "in 1821."⁷⁵ This is factually in error because an official survey of June 13, 1820, "taken by the poor old town compass" begins on the south county line and locates the starting point "three rods fourteen links southeast of Joseph Smith's dwelling house."⁷⁶ Orsamus Turner remembered seeing this first log structure the previous winter, and the probable date of the move to this farm is 1816, when William would have been a mere five years old.

One cannot be certain that Joseph Smith told his vision of 1820 to young William—or that the boy would have been receptive to such a religious experience. Up to 1823 he resisted conversion, since he was "quite young and inconsiderate";⁷⁷ during the years 1823-27, he paid "no attention to religion of any kind."⁷⁸ William left two orderly narrations of his early life. In both, the earliest point of recall regarding Joseph's religious experience is the appearance of the angel in 1823: "I remember when Joseph called his father's family together and told them that he had seen an angel, and what this angel had told him."⁷⁹ Lucy and William Smith agree in detail on Joseph's announcement of the angel's message in 1823. Mother Smith draws the vivid image of several formal reports to the family, "all seated in a circle" giving "the most profound attention" to the young Prophet.⁸⁰ William underlines the first reaction: "The whole family were melted to tears, and believed all he said."⁸¹

The close agreement of William and Lucy on these personal events of the Smith household furnishes a reasonable hypothesis of their differences concerning Joseph's experiences prior to that time. Variations must be accounted for by individual perception in two obviously sincere individuals. Mother Smith separates the events surrounding Joseph's vision in 1820 from the later appearance of the angel announcing the plates of the Book of Mormon in 1823. Before then William may not have been told of the first event, or if told, it failed to

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Palmyra Town Record, Book 1, p. 221.

⁷⁷*William Smith on Mormonism*, p. 6.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁹Sermon on June 8, 1884, at Deloit, Iowa, *Saints' Herald*, Vol. 31, No. 40 (October 4, 1884), p. 643.

⁸⁰Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, pp. 83-84.

⁸¹*William Smith on Mormonism*, p. 9.

register as meaningful to him. In 1823 Joseph stood before the family and probably recounted both experiences on the same occasion. It is likely that the two experiences merged in William's mind because he first heard them together. William relates all the elements of the visions described separately by his brother and mother, but he telescopes every detail into a single experience.

There is a fascinating corollary to William's obvious lack of firsthand information prior to 1823. His published memoirs depend heavily upon the Cowdery account for background of Joseph's vision. William's narrations follow the same sequence as the two installments of December 1834, and February 1835, in the *L.D.S. Messenger and Advocate*, though Oliver's expansive style is considerably shortened by William. The following passages are copied quite directly from the early account, with the intervening quotation of Mt. 7:13-14 used similarly by both writers:

Oliver Cowdery in 1834-35

If he went to one he was told they were right, and all others were wrong—If to another, the same was heard from those: All professed to be the true church.⁸²

But if others were not benefited, our brother was urged forward and strengthened in the determination to know for himself of the certainty and reality of pure and holy religion. . . . [H]e continued to call upon the Lord in secret for a full manifestation of divine approbation . . . to have an assurance that he was accepted of him.⁸³

William Smith in 1883

If he went to one he was told they were right, and all others were wrong. If to another, the same was heard from them. Each professed to be the true church.

All this however was beneficial to him, as it urged him forward, and strengthened him in the determination to know for himself of the certainty and reality of pure and holy religion. He continued in secret to call upon the Lord for a full manifestation of his will, the assurance that he was accepted of him . . .⁸⁴

Significantly, William Smith relied upon what he remembered for the appearance and message of the angel (differing here considerably from Cowdery), but he relied upon published records for the background of the vision. This raises

⁸²*L.D.S. Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (December 1834), p. 43.

⁸³*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (February 1835), p. 78.

⁸⁴*William Smith on Mormonism*, pp. 7-8.

a serious question concerning William's own confidence in his memory of the events preceding Joseph's announcement concerning the angel and the plates. By his own performance, William is not likely to have a comprehensive picture of events or chronology prior to 1823, although he may be accurate on certain details within his experience prior to that time. He made his own comparison of the quality of his early recollections and Joseph's narrative: "A more elaborate and accurate description of his vision, however, will be found in his own history."⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

Historical analysis of Joseph Smith's earliest religious experiences raises the larger question of what documentation can reasonably be expected for such events. A few writers on this subject virtually claim that one could not accept the vision if it were not headlined by the regional press in the spring of 1820. But that is projecting twentieth century journalism onto the patterns of another age, for precious little local news reached the columns of the country newspaper of Joseph Smith's youth. A more realistic criterion is the outside publicity given the rise of Christianity. Contemporary mention of this obscure religious reform is absent until it became an influential force, and at that point comment emerges in Roman sources. Non-Mormon references to the First Vision follow this parallel. The earliest known newspaper allusion is a reaction to the first great success of Latter-day Saint proselyting, the Ohio-Missouri mission. "Our Painesville correspondent" forwarded a report of the 1830 preaching of "Cowdery and his friends" in Ohio: "Smith (they affirmed), had seen God frequently and personally."⁸⁶

At the peak of his career in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith was a creative religious innovator, but every important First Vision

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 9. Further research might probe the question of the earlier recollections of William Smith. In 1883 and 1884, he described the appearance of a "personage" or angel in the woods, where the brilliant light descended upon the trees without affecting them. In an apparently well-reported interview of 1841, William's 1823 setting of the single vision appears, but the location of the vision follows Joseph's history: "The glory of the Lord filled the chamber with a dazzling light . . ." Letter of Rev. James Murdock to the *Hartford Observer*, June 19, 1841, cit. *Peoria Register and North-western Gazetteer*, Sept. 3, 1841, cit. Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, rev. ed., Vol. 2 (Salt Lake City, 1959), p. 410.

⁸⁶*The Reflector*, Palmyra, New York, February 14, 1831.

account antedates that period. The visions of the 1820's were historically recorded in the 1830's, with the first detailed account of the First Vision framed in 1831-32, about a decade after the event. This compares favorably to the best parallel, the New Testament record of Christian revelations. For instance, Paul's first vision occurred about 33 A.D., but his only detailed descriptions are speeches given in the period 58-60 A.D., also the earliest date for the composition of Acts, in which these speeches and Luke's historical account of Paul's vision appear. In present terms, many readers of this article in 1969 remember very well certain episodes of December 7, 1941 (a quarter of a century ago), because of their aroused emotions on "a day that will live in infamy." Some twenty years after the death of his brother Alvin, Joseph Smith said that the vivid memories of that event had not left him.⁸⁷ The First Vision, an experience of greater emotional impact, was entered in the early ledger book after about half that time. This paper has shown that Joseph Smith's memory is basically accurate for the external events of his early life.

Although not commenting upon the circumstances of the First Vision, Joseph Smith's father alluded to the experience itself. The occasion was a formal gathering of the entire Smith family and a few trusted Church leaders in 1834 to receive their blessings from the appointed patriarch of the Church. The meeting was opened by brief observations of the sixty-three-year-old leader, surveying his personal and family history. He recalled that the Lord had "often" given him "visions" and "dreams," a supporting statement for the seven related in detail by his wife, the last of which is dated 1819 by her. He reviewed God's favor on the family in their "many afflictions," mentioning specifically the tragedies of the "untimely birth" of a son (about 1797), the death of another child "in his infancy" (1810), and the 1823 death of Alvin, "taken from us in the vigor of life, in the bloom of youth."⁸⁸ Obviously, Joseph Sr. was voicing the personal convictions and traditions of an entire household. After a prayer, the initial blessing was given to his prophet-son. The opening words of Joseph Smith, Sr., summarized the spiritual career of the twenty-eight-year-

⁸⁷See Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 587 (April 9, 1842) and Vol. 5, pp. 126-127 (August 22, 1842).

⁸⁸L.D.S. Historian's Patriarchal Blessing Book 1, p. 1.

old Joseph Smith, Jr., as then accepted by those who knew him most intimately:

The Lord thy God has called thee by name out of the heavens; thou hast heard his voice from on high from time to time, even in thy youth.⁸⁹

In a series of revelations given "from time to time," the initial experience mentioned is not the coming of an angel, but an incident in which the youth is addressed personally by God from the heavens.⁹⁰ Thus the patriarch spontaneously gives the same sequence for the First Vision as found in the writings of his wife and prophet-son.

To recapitulate, the reality of the First Vision has recently been challenged on the ground that no revivals are found in the village of Palmyra in the years immediately surrounding Joseph Smith's date of 1820. But a study of the leading non-Mormon recollection of the Prophet's early religious investigations makes this line of investigation largely irrelevant. Orsamus Turner, printer's apprentice in Palmyra until about 1820, recalled young Joseph's "catching a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods . . ." Thus the "religious excitement" that the Prophet identifies as preceding his First Vision must be seen in a rural setting, what a contemporary minister of the Genesee Conference termed "forest gatherings."⁹¹ The documented camp meeting near Palmyra in 1820 is no doubt typical of many others not noted in the press. But a constellation of Methodist preachers comprising all circuits of western New York gathered in their annual meeting at nearby Phelps in 1819. The impact of their public preaching is measured by the description of the "crowds which gathered from far and near" for the conference of the previous year.⁹²

A careful study of the quality of recollection found in the writings of William Smith and Oliver Cowdery render them

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁰The terminology of the Prophet's father carries significant connotations. Although "youth" is inexact and variable in different contexts, the concept of Joseph being "called . . . by name" is found in the direct address of the 1831-32 account and the language of the 1838 history ("One of them spake unto me, calling me by name . . ."). Also the "voice from on high" in the patriarch's statement finds a parallel in the definite reference to the First Vision at the beginning of the 1831-32 account: "firstly, he receiving the testimony from on high."

⁹¹Peck, *Life and Times*, p. 48.

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 93.

not prime sources for the First Vision itself. This means in essence that recent challenges to the Prophet's first religious experience have set up the problem with improper sources and have attempted a solution by studying only one type of revival in an unduly restricted locality. When the personal recollections that reach back to 1820 are isolated, the few Mormon and non-Mormon sources that qualify are in basic agreement. Though scornful of Mormon claims and preoccupied with money-digging gossip, Orsamus Turner and Pomeroy Tucker agree that Joseph Smith loosely affiliated with Methodism but shortly announced a negative evaluation of all Christian churches. A study of Turner's early life, combined with the shortness of Joseph Smith's Methodist association indicated in Tucker, requires a date of approximately 1820 for these events. By far the best independent source on Joseph's early personal life is his mother, who confirms the religious excitement about 1819 "in the surrounding country," relates his vision, describes his ostracism afterwards, and emphasizes that his conviction that the churches were wrong prevented his following the majority of the adults of his family in participation in the local revivals of 1824-25. Beyond these historical details, it is most impressive that both parents express acceptance of the First Vision. An exacting study of existing recollections of the early 1820 period leaves the distinct impression that Joseph Smith is more accurate on his early history than any of his current critics.

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